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### Amerindian Creation Myths and a Common Tradition

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AMERINDIAN CREATION MYTHS AND A COMMON TRADITION

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

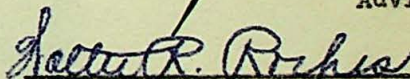
Robert L. Lail

June 1950

Approved by:



Advisor



Reader



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## CHAPTER I

### THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIMILAR CREATION MYTHS

Among primitives acting independently of each other in various parts of the world, there is, humanly speaking, an almost inexplicable consistency of religious belief. Many scholars have attempted to explain this universal consistency of belief. Lang accounts for this diffusion of the same stories all over the world as follows:

An ancient identity of mental status, and the working of similar mental forces at the attempt to explain the same phenomena, will account, without any theory of borrowing, or of transmission of myth, or of original unity of race, for the world-wide diffusion on many mythical conceptions.<sup>1</sup>

Tylor likewise says "That the same imaginative processes regularly recur, that the world-wide myths show the regularity and the consistency of the human imagination."<sup>2</sup> Menzies himself disagrees with writers such as Wilhelm Schmidt, who promote the idea of a primitive revelation. He declares:

It has been ascribed to a primitive revelation. But . . . how could all mankind forget a pure religion? . . . No. The history of early civilization is the history of a struggle . . . in which he is not remembering something he had lost, but advancing by new routes to a land he never reached before. . . We may also put aside the theory that man had religion from the first as an innate idea.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lang, Myth, Ritual, and Religion, as quoted in History of Religion, by Allan Menzies (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902) p.22.

<sup>2</sup>Tylor, Primitive Culture, quoted by Allan Menzies in History of Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902) p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Allan Menzies, op. cit., pp. 23, 24.



This same viewpoint has been very aptly and clearly propounded by Lewis Spence in the concluding portion of his book, The Mythologies of Ancient Mexico and Peru, where he writes:

. . . the origins of the religions of Mexico and Peru could not have been of any other than an indigenous nature. Their evolution took place wholly upon American soil, and if resemblances appear in their systems to the mythologies or religions of Asia, they are explicable by the law now so well known to anthropologists and students of comparative religion, that, given similar circumstances, and similar environments, the evolution of the religious beliefs of widely separated peoples will proceed upon similar lines.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Menzies, Spence bases his conclusion, that there was no common origin of religious belief, on the theory that man's religion is evolving from the more primitive, rather than it being now a degeneration of a higher form of worship. He states very definitely that, in the early part of the twentieth century, anthropology could not have subscribed to the latter view:

The question of Asiatic influences must not altogether be cast aside as an untenable theory; but it is well to bear in mind that such influences, did they even exist, must have been of the most transitory description, and could have left but few traces upon the religion of the peoples in question. . . . When speaking of faiths carried from Asia into America at the period of its original settlement, it is first necessary to premise Pleistocene Man had already arrived at that stage of mental development in which the existence of supernatural beings is recognized -- a premise with which modern anthropology would scarcely find itself in agreement.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Brinton, who also denies that the origin of these myths lies in a common tradition, admits, however, that the similarities of the myths are amazing:

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<sup>4</sup>Lewis Spence, The Mythologies of Ancient Mexico and Peru (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1907) p. 77.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 6.



The astonishing similarity, the absolute identities, which constantly present themselves in myths and cults separated by oceans and continents . . . have been construed as evidence of common descent or of distant transmission. . . . Wherever we turn, in time or space, to the earliest and simplest religions of the world, we find them dealing with nearly the same objective facts in nearly the same subjective fashion, the differences being due to local and temporal causes.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere Dr. Brinton has reiterated his astonishment at the similarities of myths among the primitives. He had just reviewed the myths of the Americans, when he added:

These myths, and many others, hint of general conceptions of life and the world, wide-spread theories of things, such as we are not accustomed to expect among savage nations, such as may very exousably excite a doubt as to their native origin. . . . Is it hitherto, in the pride of intellectual culture, we have never done justice to the thinking faculties of those whom we call barbarians? Or shall we accept the alternative, that these are the unappreciated heirlooms bequethed a rude race by a period of higher civilization, long since extinguished by constant wars and ceaseless fear? Or that they have been passed from hand to hand to America from the famed and ancient centers of civilization in Asia and Egypt? With almost unanimous consent the latter has been accepted as the true solution. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Although Brinton indicated that most students of anthropology accepted the latter as the true solution, he himself could not agree.

On the other hand, there are a number of men that not only admit a striking similarity among the myths of the world, but they also attribute this similarity to a common origin, a common tradition. Among these is the well-known Austrian priest, Father Schmidt, who has developed this theory in his great work, Ursprung der Gottesidee. In the work that forced his colleagues to take him seriously for the first time, High Gods in North America, Schmidt makes known his viewpoint at the very outset:

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<sup>6</sup>Daniel Brinton, Religions of Primitive Peoples (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897) p. 9.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, 1896) pp. 267. 268.



Firstly, in regard to the development of human culture in spatial juxtaposition, the monogenesis of mankind, now formally established and accepted by almost all anthropologists of rank, makes it clear that man, in almost all the regions of the earth where we encounter him today, has migrated from elsewhere. Thus it was not the last region where he arrived that created his culture; it modified his culture, acquired already in other stages of his manifold migrations.<sup>8</sup>

Alexander, in his volume on the North American Indians also states:

It has recently been the custom of writers dealing with Indian beliefs to assert that the conception of a Great Spirit or Great Mystery is imported by white teachers, that the untutored Indian knows no such being; the universality of the earlier tradition as to the native existence of this idea is regarded as of little consequence, almost as a studied misinterpretation. Nevertheless, when we find such definite conceptions as that of the Kitshi Manito among the Algonquins or Tirawa-atius in Pawnee religion, or even such indefinite ones as that of the Carrier Indians' Yuttoere (that which is on high), we begin to question the truth of the modern assertion. As a matter of fact, there is hardly a tribe that does not possess its belief in what may very properly be called a Great Spirit, or Great Mystery, or Master of Life. . . . If these preconceptions of the white man be avoided, and the Great Spirit be judged by what he does and the manner in which he is approached, his difference from the Supreme Deity of the white man is not so apparent.<sup>9</sup>

Students of anthropology, as the author has already pointed out, agree almost unanimously that the similarities among the myths themselves are astonishing. Others have proceeded a step further and have declared the similarity between the myths of the primitives and the accounts of the Bible to be so amazing as to indicate the later influence of missionaries, or, on the other hand, as to indicate a common origin and tradition. Murray, in discussing the traditions of the Incas, is of the opinion that the similarities are not due to the later influence of missionaries:

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<sup>8</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American, edited by L.H. Gray (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) X, 82.



Parallels have also been pointed out between passages in the Old Testament and fragments of late Inca oral poetry recorded by Spanish friars, parallels so striking that for a long time historians accused the friars of "doctoring" this Inca literature. Students of the history of religion today, however, say that the existence of monotheistic ideas among primitives the world over has been established independently of any known Old Testament influence. . .<sup>10</sup>

Murray states further that "prehistory and Scripture meet on common ground at several points, among which the following seem to be the most important: the place of man's origin, the physical appearance of the first man, . . .<sup>11</sup>

Thus the reader has been led to the subject of this thesis. He is aware of a universal consistency of beliefs. It is quite evident that there is a likeness between these beliefs and the accounts of Scripture. The reader is also aware of the fact that there is a difference of opinion among students of anthropology concerning the origin of these similarities. With this overall view in mind, the author has decided to limit the investigation to creation myths, and, with these, the concept of a Creator-God. The author has limited the thesis further to myths and fragments of myths which are, in any manner, parallel to the account of creation as recorded in Genesis, and, further, to only those myths found among the Amerindians, the natives of the Western Hemisphere.

At the outset, it is interesting to note what type of native exists on the American continents, whether he is autochthonous, and, if not, from where he has emigrated. Father Schmidt has formed a very definite conclusion on this matter, and, as far as evidence is available at this time, the

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<sup>10</sup> R.W. Murray, Mans Unknown Ancestors (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., c.1943) p. 320.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 344.



author has concluded that Father Schmidt's theory is the most probable of those submitted. Schmidt contends that:

It is absolutely certain that man in America is not autochthonous but has migrated to it from without. . . The study of this immigration . . . is to a remarkable degree facilitated by the fact that the whole immense continent was, for these earliest men with their fragile means of transport (bark canoes, or rafts), not accessible across the ocean; consequently there exists but a single possibility as to the way in which the immigrations occurred. The north-east is geologically excluded by the fact that Europe and America were already separated in pre-human times. . . Prof. Dr. Rivet of Paris liked to derive the oldest tribes of South America, the Fuegians, from Australian tribes; and he is of the opinion that he has found evidence of linguistic relationship between these two groups. . . But he has taken these from the most disparate Australian languages -- languages which have in the majority of the cases no affinity whatever with each other. In any case there remains the immense difficulty of explaining in what way these utterly primitive Australians with their fragile canoes and rafts could cross the immense spaces of the Pacific. Naturally, the Polynesians, . . . with their highly developed navigation, could have done so. . . Thus there remains a sole porta invasionis for the first and oldest immigration into America -- the Behring Strait from north-east Asia to north-west America.<sup>12</sup>

To substantiate his theory that these primitives could have crossed at the Behring Strait, Father Schmidt quotes Dr. Steinmann, Professor of Geology at the University of Bonn, in a lecture, "Zur Urbesiedlung Amerikas", given before the International Congress of Americanists at the Hague, 1924. Dr. Steinmann explained that, at the time of the first migrations into America, Behring Strait was not a chain of islands, but a continuous strip of land, which even at the narrowest point (Bay of Anadyr) was five hundred kilometers broad (the breadth of France).<sup>13</sup> At this point it is interesting to note the legend which Spence relates concerning the possibility of an Asiatic

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<sup>12</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) pp. 14. 15.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 16.



# influence on America:

... there is just the possibility that Mexico, or some adjacent country of Central America, was visited by Asiatic Buddhist priests in the fifth century. The story is told in the Chinese annals of the wanderings of five Buddhist priests, natives of Cabul, who journeyed to America (which they designate Fusang) via the Aleutian Islands and Kamohatka, a region then well known to the Chinese.<sup>14</sup>

On a basis much more reliable than this mere legend, Spence feels very definitely that the immigration to America must have originated in the Asiatic region and moved via the Behring Strait into the Americas. In these words he corroborates the conclusions which Father Schmidt was to draw twenty years later:

When we come to the question of the settlement of America from the Asiatic side we can say with more certainty that immigration proceeded from that continent by way of Behring Strait, and was of a Proto-Mongolian character. . . . However, immigration on any extensive scale must have been discontinued at a very early period, as on the discovery of America the natives presented a highly specialized and distinctive type, and bear such a resemblance one nation to another, as to draw from all authorities the conclusion that they are of common origin. According to all known anthropological standards the Amerind (as it has been agreed to designate the American Indian) bears a close affinity to the Mongolian races of Asia, and it must be admitted that the most likely origin that can be assigned him is one in which Asiatic, or to be more exact, Mongolian blood preponderates.<sup>15</sup>

In conclusion, Father Schmidt points out that the more recent waves of immigration landed by water on the coast of Mexico or Central America, and that this later culture, with a less clear-cut concept of a Supreme Creator, spread into the area that is now the United States and influenced the tribes existing there to produce a mixture and contrast in beliefs. As a result, the Algonkins, whom Father Schmidt supposes to have been in the earlier mi-

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<sup>14</sup>Lewis Spence, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 3. 4.



grations, have a rather clear concept of a High God, while the Pueblo Indians, as an example of the later influence, have a distorted picture, showing a more highly developed cultism. As Father Schmidt himself expressed it:

Thus we have established the significant fact that all the tribes with totemism, or mother-right, or both, come from the south and suggest Mexico and Central America, but coming ultimately from Asia. Thus these later and higher cultures found their way to America not from the north over the Behring Strait, but from Indonesia and south-east Asia; for with their more highly developed navigation they were able to cross the Pacific and land directly in Central America and Mexico. As a matter of fact, all these Siouan, Iroquois, Muskogian, Pueblo, and Gaddo-Pawnee tribes possess agriculture and other higher forms of civilization, or show traces of having possessed them formerly. And finally, a fact of special interest for our purpose, in all these tribes of more recent ethnological age there is none whose religion includes a true High God, but they show religions with highly developed solar or lunar mythologies and cults or complicated combinations of them.<sup>16</sup>

If this theory be correct, then the reader may well expect to see a divergence in the concepts of a Supreme Being, as well as the creation myths, among the Amerindians; the older migrations, where they remained uninfluenced by other cultures, will have retained myths closely paralleling the Genesis account, while the more recent migrations will have the idea of creation feebly developed, casting, at the same time, their influence over the neighboring tribes from the older migrations. Thus the author has found this existing situation, with an account of creation recorded among the Yuki of north-central California very similar to that of Genesis; in contrast to this, the Selish tribes of northwest North America, the most recent of the three oldest groups that immigrated, differ as to the origin of man.<sup>17</sup>

In general, the concept of creation is wide-spread in the Americas. Dr.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 115.



Brinton, who, as the reader has seen, denies a common tradition for the similarity of myths in general, and of creation myths in particular, has made some very significant statements about the universality of, not just the creation myths, but the detailed particulars in these myths. Referring to all people all over the world, he said that "all agree that before time began water held all else in solution, covered and concealed everything".<sup>18</sup> In another of his works, Dr. Brinton cited some instances of deluge myths, and added:

Associated with this cycle is the myth of the terrestrial Paradise, watered by its four rivers, and enclosing the tree of life, -- the happy abode of early man. The four rivers are the celestial streams from the four corners of the earth, watering the tree as the emblem of life. Thus we find it among the American Indians, the Sioux, and the Aztecs, the Mayas, . . .<sup>19</sup>

In another instance Brinton registers his amazement at the number of times the creation myths refer to man being created from dust. Speaking of the tribes of North and South America, he remarked "it is at first sight astonishing with what . . . almost monotony their religions refer to the earth as the mother of living creatures as well as of the vegetable kingdom".<sup>20</sup>

Curtin, in his Creation Myths of Primitive America, states emphatically that man is distinctly different and something superior in the drama of creation for the American Indians -- the creation of man is a final, cul-

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<sup>18</sup>Daniel Brinton, Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) p. 227.

<sup>19</sup>Daniel Brinton, Religions of Primitive Peoples (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, c.1897) p. 126.

<sup>20</sup>Daniel Brinton, Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) p. 263.



minating act. At the outset, in the Introduction of his book, he makes this clear: "Man, in the American scheme of creation, stands apart and separate; he is quite alone, peculiar, and special."<sup>21</sup>

Creation ex nihilo, as found in the Bible, is also recorded among the North American Indians. Father Schmidt asserted this when he wrote:

The Supreme Being is recognized as Creator . . . among the Ainu, . . . the oldest Tierra del Fuego people, and most especially among the primitives of the American Northwest and North Central Californians, the Algonquin and the Winnebago. In the last group we find the idea of creation ex nihilo expressed with the greatest definiteness and explicitness.<sup>22</sup>

Creation ex nihilo, and many other parallels to the Biblical account imply a possible relationship between the accounts. This relationship appears more than coincidental. As Zwemer shows, "not only . . . in the legends and myths of the creation in general, but also in those relating to the creation of man are there strange coincidences and parallels to the record in Genesis".<sup>23</sup> The reader is perhaps tempted to agree with him -- tempted to accept the conclusion that these many creation myths do point to a common tradition, as Zwemer so aptly expressed it:

The evidence of anthropology therefore seems to be that of an almost universal tradition of a creation of the world by a High-God in which man occupies a special place as its culmination. Moreover, we find together with this account of man's place in the universe and parallel to it a widely-spread tradition of man's displacement, of a tragedy of disobedience and the loss of his former state of happiness. Who can resist the conclusion that these many and multiform creation-myths,

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<sup>21</sup>Jeremiah Curtin, Creation Myths of Primitive America (London: Williams and Morgate, c.1898) p.xi.(Introduction).

<sup>22</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 272.

<sup>23</sup>Samuel Zwemer, The Origin of Religion (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1935) p. 116.



these constant memories of a lost "age of innocence" point to a common human tradition and corroborate the scriptural data?<sup>24</sup>

It is with this aim in mind, namely, to show how the creation myths of the Amerindians point to a common tradition, rather than prove this tradition, that an investigation will be undertaken of the creation myths of the Americas, along with an analysis of the native American's concept of a Creator-God. This will be the aim of the subsequent chapters.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 119. 120.



## CHAPTER II

### CREATION WITH THE ALGONKINS AND NEIGHBORING TRIBES

An investigation of the creation myths of the Amerindians should start with the oldest tribes, if a chronological sequence be followed, or the Arctic aborigines, if a geographical order be attempted. In this case it would be the same, namely, the Samoyeds. Wherever possible a geographical order from north to south will be followed.

The Samoyeds of the Arctic region could be grouped with the natives of Tierra del Fuego, since their information, or rather, want of information concerning creation puts them in the same category. The Samoyeds have a High God, Numa, who is the creator of all things,<sup>1</sup> and the Fuegians likewise have a Supreme Being who is recognized as Creator.<sup>2</sup> But among perhaps the oldest of American primitives, one would expect some of the most clear and untainted creation accounts. But these tribes have very few corresponding similarly with the myths diffused throughout the primitive world. Father Schmidt offers an explanation for this paradox in the introductory section to High Gods in North America:

The most widespread of human migrations is represented by the oldest tribes on the extreme southern borders of the habitable globe, the South-East Australians and Tasmanians in the South Sea, the Fuegians in South America, and the Bushmen in Africa. In the other direction the tribes on the extremest northern borders of the earth, the Samoyeds, Koryaks, Caribou Eskimo (Ainu), belong to these ethnologically oldest peoples of mankind. Now all these tribes occupying the remot-

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<sup>1</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Ursprung der Gottesidee, quoted in The Origin of Religion, by Samuel Zwemer (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1935) p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 272.



est southern and northern borders of the earth possess religions, including an authentic High God. But in their long and wide migrations, in their extreme isolation, and in the wretched environments into which they have been thrust by later and stronger peoples, these tribes on the extreme margins of the earth, and especially those on its southern margin, have lost some elements of their ancient religion. Among the Bushmen the relation of religion to morality is wanting; among the Fuegians the idea of creation is feebly developed . . .<sup>3</sup>

With this meagre information explaining their origin in this world, the student of anthropology passes on from the arctic and antarctic tribes to the wealth of data recorded between -- the records of the Indians inhabiting largely the area of the present-day United States. Among these one finds some of the oldest tribes of North America, many accounts of creation, and numerous Supreme Beings and Creator-Gods, having a different name with each tribe, but the same concept. Concerning these oldest tribes, Father Schmidt relates that:

. . . the North-Central Californians, the Algonkins, and the Selish, are recognized by all competent scholars as the oldest peoples of North America. . . Now it is precisely among these three oldest primitive peoples of North America that we find a clear and firmly established belief which, especially in the oldest of them, the North-Central Californians and the Algonkins, is of quite a particular character by virtue of the high importance attributed to the idea of creation. It is not only that these people have developed wonderful creation legends which form the main subjects of their initiations and solemn ceremonies, but also it is the fact that quite a number of them have reached the highest summit of the idea of creation even to Aristotle, viz. the belief in creatio ex nihilo, only by the will of the all-powerful Creator.<sup>4</sup>

For their concept of the Creator, "Brinton tells us that, not only among the civilized Aztecs, but even among the inhabitants of Hayti, the Lenni Len-

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<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) pp. 136. 137.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 19.



ape, and other American tribes, we find such names affixed to their deities as 'Endless', 'Omnipotent', 'Invisible', 'Maker and Moulder of all things', 'Mother and Father of life', . . . 'The Creator of all that is', and 'The Soul of the world'.<sup>5</sup> Schmidt adds that it is among the North American tribes that the name of creator is most widely distributed of all, " . . . where it takes the form of 'maker', 'creator', 'creator of the earth', and 'creator of the world'; among the Samoyeds he is known as 'creator of life'.<sup>6</sup> Among the tribes of central California the Creator has these names: with the Yuki He is labeled Taikomai, meaning "He who goes alone"; with the Maidu the Creator is named Kodoyanpe, meaning "Earth-Maker"; and with the Wintu He is called Olalbisi, or "He who lives alone".<sup>7</sup>

Father Schmidt relates that the North American primitives even have ceremonies in which they enact the creation of the world. He directs attention to the fact that:

In North-Central California and among the Eastern and Western Algonkin these ritual festivities occur almost every year, and have taken the form of grateful, we may even say sacramental, commemorations; they last four, eight, nine or twelve days and enact the creation of the world and man.<sup>8</sup>

To narrow the investigation to a specific detail for the moment, in

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<sup>5</sup>Daniel Brinton, quoted in Ten Great Religions by James Freeman Clarke (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., c.1883) II, 122.

<sup>6</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 268.

<sup>7</sup>A.L. Kroeber, in University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, quoted by Albert Hantsch, Cultural Anthropology (New York: Bruce Publishing Co., c.1934) p. 214.

<sup>8</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 281.



North American mythology there are a number of legends that mention the creation of a primal pair. The myths do not always agree on the method or manner in which they were created, but there is often the record of an original two. Sometimes it is veiled in obscurity; in other places it is unmistakably clear. Note, for example, the tribes which Father Schmidt writes about:

In this connection we may mention the Kato-Yuki, the north-east Algonquins, the second creation myth of the Samoyedes, and, to a certain extent, the Coyote of the northeast Selish. The second group clearly sets forth that the ancestral pair was created by the Supreme Being, and this only after the rest of creation. . . Here must be reckoned the valley Maidu, and in essentials the East Pomo, who for the rest represent a mixture of the Maidu and the Yuki type; and, in addition, the west Algonquins and probably the first creation myth of the Samoyedes, which however is incomplete on this point. . . Most of the tribal ancestors without tribal ancestress would find place in the second group; for example, Kuksu of the east, Pomo, the hare-rabbit-ancestor of the west-central Algonquins, Kenos of the Selknam, and the Aionia of the Ainu.<sup>9</sup>

The investigation of creation myths, however, must be narrowed to include details of individual tribes; so, beginning with the East Algonkins, the investigation will proceed westward to include the natives of California and British Columbia.

On the east coast the Algonkins, recognized as one of the oldest tribes of North America, have a very definite concept of a Creator and creation:

The Algonquins of the north recognize as the chief of their Manitos, Kitshi Manito, the Great Spirit, whom they also call the Master of Life. He is . . . the author of life, but himself uncreated . . . Pere Le Jeune wrote thus in 1663, concerning the Montagnais: "Talking one day of God, in a cabin, they asked me what this God was. I told them that it was He who could everything, and who made the sky and the earth. They began to say to one another, 'Atohocan, Atohocan, it is Atohocan.'" Winslow, writing in 1622, mentions a similar spirit, Kiehtan, recog-

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<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm Schmidt, Primitive Revelation (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., c.1939) p. 203.



nized by the Massachusetts Indians; and the early writers on the Virginia Indians tell of their belief "that there is one chiefe God that hath beene from all etermitie" who made the world and set the sun and moon and stars to be his ministers.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the Amerindian tribes, not only enact the creation in their ceremonial dances, but express their beliefs in their ceremonial prayers, when they offer tobacco as a conciliatory move, or in the prayers that preceded the crossing of a large body of water. Similarly the Senecas prayed at the White Dog Sacrifice in February, celebrating the new year. The following is a portion of this long ceremonial prayer:

Now we commence our invocation,  
Now we speak of all you have created.  
Now (in the beginning) you did think that  
men-beings should inherit the blessings of your creations,  
. . . we are all that remains on the earth.  
You behold the places that once were filled but now are empty;  
We were unable to change it, for you made the law.<sup>11</sup>

The Central Algonkins appear to have put explicit trust in their omnipotent Creator in the following incident:

When the Algonquin Indians set out to cross Lake Superior, the canoes stopped close together, and the chief, in a loud voice, offered a prayer to the Great Spirit, entreating him to give them a good passage. 'You have made this lake', said he, 'and made us, your children. Cause this water to be smooth while we pass over.'<sup>12</sup>

This prayer-introduction of the Northern Iroquois is quite similar: "Hail! Hail! Hail! Thou who hast created all things, . . . listen to our words . . ."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) X, 19. 20.

<sup>11</sup>Wilson Wallis, Religion in Primitive Society (New York: F.S. Crofts and Co., 1939) p. 135.

<sup>12</sup>James Freeman Clarke, Ten Great Religions New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., c.1883) II, 225.

<sup>13</sup>Wilson Wallis, op. cit., p. 136.



Among the Lenape-Delawares of the East Algonkin group, there is a famous ancient creation legend called the Walum Olum. Walum Olum means "red paint score" and has reference to the manner in which the chief or priest inscribed the legend on birch bark in pictographic figures. It has a number of parallels to the Genesis account. This is it:

1. At first, in that place, in all times, above the earth,
2. On the earth (was) an extended fog, and there the Great Manitu was,
3. At first, forever, lost in space, everywhere, the Great Manitu was,
4. He made the extended land and the sky.
5. He made the sun, the moon, the stars,
6. He made them all to move evenly.
7. Then the wind blew violently, and it cleared, and the water flowed off far and strong,
8. And groups of new islands grew and then remained:
9. Then spoke the Great Manitu, a manitu to manitus,
10. To beings, mortals, souls, and all,
11. And ever he was a manitu to men, and he was their grandfather.
12. He gave the first mother, the mother of beings,
13. The fishes he gave, the turtles he gave, the animals he gave, the birds he gave . . .<sup>14</sup>

Moving southward and westward into Natchez country, the legend of the Natchez records how men were formed from clay:

All those tribes, the Creeks, Seminoles, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Natchez, who, according to tradition, were in remote times banded into one common confederacy under the headship of the last mentioned, unanimously located their earliest ancestry near an artificial eminence in the valley of the Black River, in the Natchez country, whence they pretended to have emerged. . . . This was the Nunne Chaha or Nunne Hangeh, the High Hill, or the Bending Hill, famous in Choctaw stories. . . . The legend was that in its center was a cave, the House of the Master of Breath. Here he made the first men from clay around him, and as at that time waters covered the earth, he raised the wall to dry them on. When the soft mud had hardened into elastic flesh and firm bone, he banished the waters to their channels and beds, and gave the dry land to his creatures. The Muskogis call this mountain "King of Mountains" or "King of the Land". . .<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford University Press, 1933)

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) pp. 262, 263.



Likewise the Muskokis, or Muskhogeas, a tribe of the Seminole family, corroborate the legend of the Natchez. This is the preface, recorded by the Muskhogeas, of the preceding legend, as related by Dr. Brinton:

Before the creation, said the Muscokis, a great body of water was alone visible. Two pigeons flew to and fro over its waves, and at last spied a blade of grass rising above the surface. Dry land gradually followed, and the islands and continents took their present shape.<sup>16</sup>

The account then continues as the Natchez legend.<sup>17</sup> But the appearance of the pigeons seems to carry some significance, undoubtedly signifying the brooding of the Creative Spirit upon the waste of waters.

The Amerindians generally conceive of the Supreme One as always good. He may have created the world and then left it alone thereafter, as the cosmogony of the Incas narrates concerning Viracocha,<sup>18</sup> but he is not the originator of evil. The Shawnee tribes express this same sentiment about their Creator:

During the first three periods of the creation, say the Central Algonquin Shawnees, our Grandmother originated nothing bad, but only beneficial things. Evil origins and events they ascribe to her grandson . . . Rounded-Side, or to another grandson introduced in some variants, the devil. . . The creator, or creatress . . . tolerates the nonsense of her silly Boys, but retains firm control of them.<sup>19</sup>

As the investigation turns to the Winnebago, a Siouan tribe of Wisconsin and Nebraska, it also turns to the research of Paul Radin, noted author

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>17</sup>Samuel Zwemer, The Origin of Religion (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, o.1935) p. 115.

<sup>18</sup>Lewis Spence, The Mythologies of Ancient Mexico and Peru (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1907) p. 49.

<sup>19</sup>Wilson Wallis, op. cit., p. 88.



on primitive religions, but, in particular, a specialist among the Winnebago tribe, having studied their myths with them for five years, 1908-1913.<sup>20</sup>

He relates that:

In one of the incidents of the great prose epic of the Winnebago entitled 'The Twins', the great hero deities . . . assemble in heaven to ask the supreme deity, Earthmaker . . . 'Hearken, father, you who dwell above, all things you have created. We desire to make you an offering. . . .'<sup>21</sup>

Earthmaker, according to Radin, is not just a Supreme Being, but his main characteristic is his all-embracing creative activity. This is the account, in part, of creation among the Winnebago:

What was it our father sat on when he came to consciousness is uncertain. Then his tears flowed and he began to cry. Not long did he think. He saw nothing and nothing was there anywhere. He took something from the seat on which he was sitting and made a portion of our earth. Then he sent the earth below him. From where he sat, he looked at his own creation and it became similar to our earth. However nothing grew upon it and it was entirely without covering. It had not become quiet but was spinning around. . . . He had sent the rocks (a female spirit) clear through the earth, throughout its extent, and only the heads remained uncovered. He looked at his creation and saw that it had become quiet. No clouds appeared anywhere, the light of day seemed motionless, and the vibration of heat looked like spider-webs going past, floating.<sup>22</sup>

Radin adds, at the end of this portion of their creation myth, that "it is only then that he begins to create the animal inhabitants of the earth. As in the Biblical account, man is created last. . . ."<sup>23</sup> Here one can see that,

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<sup>20</sup>Paul Radin, "The Culture of the Winnebago as Described by Themselves", Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics (Baltimore: Waverly Press, Inc., 1949) Preface. p. 1-5.

<sup>21</sup>Paul Radin, Primitive Religion (New York: Viking Press, c.1937) p. 216.

<sup>22</sup>Paul Radin, Winnebago Tribe, quoted in his Primitive Religion (New York: Viking Press, c.1937) pp. 262, 263.

<sup>23</sup>Paul Radin, Primitive Religion (New York: Viking Press, c.1937) p. 263.



in this example of creatio ex nihilo, there is retained an order of creation very similar to that of Genesis, particularly with the creation of man placed at the end of the account, and the Supreme Being alone doing the creating.

The Sioux Indians, of the Mandan group, have somewhat contradicting beliefs concerning creation. Alexander records these differing viewpoints, one expressed by the priests of the Pebble Society of the Omaha tribes, the other by the Hidatsa, also a Siouan group. Before these impressions are introduced into the thesis, it might be of value to consider what sort of conception the Omaha had of their Creator, Wakanda. Alexander relates:

Probably the Siouan conception of Wakanda, the mystery that is in all life and all creation, has been as carefully studied as any Indian religious idea. . . . Doubtless the most illuminating analysis of this great Siouan divinity . . . is that made by Miss Fletcher in her study of the Omaha tribe. Wakanda, she says, "stands for the mysterious life power permeating all natural forms and forces and all phases of man's conscious life. . . . Visible nature seems to have mirrored to the Omaha mind the everpresent activities of the invisible and mysterious Wakanda."<sup>24</sup>

The priests of the Pebble Society of the Omaha relate the following creation myth:

At the beginning all things were in the mind of Wakanda. All creatures, including man, were spirits. They moved about in space between the earth and the stars. They were seeking a place where they could come into bodily existence. . . . Then they descended to the earth. They saw that it was covered with water. They floated through the air to the north, the east, the south, and the west, and found no dry land. They were sorely grieved. Suddenly from the midst of the water uprose a great rock. It burst into flames and the waters floated into the air in the clouds. Dry land appeared; the grasses and the trees grew. The hosts of spirits descended and became flesh and blood, fed on the seeds of the grasses and the fruits of the trees, and the land vibrated with their expressions of joy and gratitude to Wakanda, the maker of all things.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) X, 82. 83.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 98.



Here the Siouan myth has recorded three ideas that are in common with many creation myths, and that point to the idea that all creation myths have their origin in one -- a common origin. First, the Omaha have conceived of a Creator that had the plan of creation already in his mind before creation; secondly, they had the concept of a primal substance, to be exact, water, covering the earth; thirdly, they considered the original state of affairs after creation to be joyful, blissful -- to repeat their own words: "the land vibrated with their expressions of joy and gratitude to Wakanda, the maker of all things". The priests did not have one concept common to many myths of the New World, namely, the idea that the Creator himself is uncreated. But the Hidatsa did. The Hidatsa differ in that they attribute creation to the First Man. As Alexander wrote concerning them: ". . . the First Man . . . formed the earth out of mud brought up from the waters by a duck. . . the Hidatsa . . . say of the First Man, the Creator, that no one made him, and that he is immortal."<sup>26</sup>

The Pawnee of Nebraska present a much more complicated version of the first things. They have a Supreme Creator called Tirawa, and retain the belief that his abode "is the highest circle of the visible universe. Tirawa-atius is his Pawnee name. All the powers in heaven and on earth are derived from him; he is the father of all things visible and invisible, and father of all the people, perpetuating the life of mankind through the gift of children . . ."<sup>27</sup> Alexander continues his account of the Pawnee, quoting a state-

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 80.



ment made by the Pawnee themselves: "We think of Tirawa as in everything, as the power which has arranged and thrown down from above everything that man needs".<sup>27</sup> This is a portion of the creation story of the Pawnee:

. . . then the Clouds gathered; the Winds blew; Lightnings and Thunders entered the Clouds. When space was canopied, Tirawa dropped a pebble into their midst, which was rolled about in the thick Clouds. The storm passed, and a waste of waters was revealed. Then to the Star-Gods of the World-Quarters Tirawa gave war-clubs, bidding them to strike the waters with them; and as they obeyed, the waters separated, and the earth was made. When all this had come to pass, Tirawa commanded the Bright Star of the evening to tell the Star-Gods of the Quarters to sing of the formation of the earth. . . the Clouds and the Winds and the Lightnings and the Thunders again assembled, and from the night of their storm earth was divided into hill and valley. Then again Tirawa bade, through Bright Star, that the Star-Gods of the quarters should sing of timber and of vegetation, and again there was a storm, and earth was given a dress of living green. A third time they sang, and the waters of the earth were cleansed and sweetened and coursed in flowing streams. A fourth time they sang, and all manner of seeds, which had dropped to the earth, sprouted into life. . .<sup>28</sup>

Although this record assigns various powers to the lesser deities, there still remain some aspects of this myth similar to other accounts. Note, for example, the belief that the earth was at first covered with water, the general order of creation as related in Genesis, and, despite the assistant creators, there is the concept of one supreme Creator, Tirawa.

The West Algonkins, the Arapaho, the Cheyenne, the Atsina, likewise have a Supreme Creator and a remarkable account of creation with details reminiscent of the Biblical record. Note particularly a prayer of the Arapaho, in which they refer to creation of an ancestral pair, a man and a woman: "My Father, have mercy on us. Remember that we are thy children ever since the time when thou hast created the heavens and the earth with one

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-107.



man and one woman."<sup>29</sup> The West Algonkins have a "great and holy life ceremony" which is "a repetition of the story of creation". They "teach that the tribal ancestor celebrated these ceremonies for the first time at the behest of the Supreme Being, and then imposed them upon the entire tribe to be celebrated forever."<sup>30</sup> The Arapaho creation story refers to the Creator as "the ancestor with the sacred pipe" or, simply, the man with the pipe:

It begins by telling how the ancestor with the sacred pipe, which represents the Supreme Being himself, wandered over the huge watery desert at the first beginning of the world. . . he wanders through this immense solitude of water six days, and in the morning of the seventh day he halts at the very place where, in the near future, the earth is to appear as the . . . abode of men. Solemnly marching he walks from there to all four cardinal points and calls into the wide world to all water-birds and reptiles which are thought of as already existing: "Hea people! . . . Come and make an attempt to search for earth!" . . . red-head duck and turtle appeared having each of them found earth. . . The man placed the two heaps of clay upon his pipe . . . and in a ceremonious manner let the dried clay go to the four quarters of the world, praying at the same time. And thus the earth was made. . . Now, every one of the different kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and plants which were created offered itself to the Creator to be used in the services of man and earth and was accepted for it. After that the Creator made the rivers and the mountains of the earth. . . After this . . . valleys, with trees having green foliage; and, in fact, the earth was clothed with an abundance of grass. After the Creator saw what he had made, he was much pleased with its appearance.<sup>31</sup>

There are three significant details in this creation myth. The statement about "the immense solitude of water" will not be treated as significant, since the investigation will encounter it so many times as to consider it as almost the unanimous belief of all Amerindians. The first detail under

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<sup>29</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Primitive Revelation (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., o.1939) p. 206.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>31</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933) pp. 69-72.



consideration may be pure conjecture, but the mention of seven days, though in a different connection as in Genesis, might indicate some relation between the two. The author repeats that this suggestion is based on presumptive evidence and remains a supposition. But the idea that plants and animals from the time of creation were to be used in the service of man, and the statement that the Creator "was much pleased" with his creation, appear in other myths and strongly suggest outside influence, if not a common tradition.

As the investigation turns to some of the rudest tribes of North America, the Pueblo tribes of New Mexico, there is still this same loftier and more recondite concept of the Creator. "Among the sedentary Zunis", Brinton relates that, "it is said of their demiurge Awonawilona that at the beginning 'he conceived within himself and thought outward in space', in order to bring nature into existence."<sup>32</sup> Alexander tells us that "in the beginning Awonawilona with the Sun Father and the Moon Mother existed above . . . With breath from his heart Awonawilona created clouds and the great waters of the world . . .". Alexander then explains that "(through the light, clouds, and air he becomes the essence and creator of vegetation)."<sup>33</sup> In order to prevent giving the Sun Father or Moon Mother preeminence over Awonawilona in the reader's mind, he emphasizes that "superior even to this primeval pair, the Zuni recognize Awonawilona, the supreme life-giving power, the initiator and embodiment of the life of the world, referred to as He-She . . ."<sup>34</sup> Here is an

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<sup>32</sup>Daniel Brinton, Religions of Primitive Peoples (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, c.1897) p. 124.

<sup>33</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) p. 206.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 187.



installment, the first part, of a Zuni creation myth:

With the substance of himself did the all-father Awonawilona impregnate the great water, the world-holding sea, so that the soums rose upon its surface, waxing wide and apart, until they became the all-containing earth and the all-covering sky. From the lying together of these twain upon the great world waters, all beings of the earth, men and creatures came to exist, and firstly in the fourfold womb of the world. In the nethermost of the cave-wombs of the world, the seed of men and creatures took form and life. The earth lay like a vast island, wet and shifting, amid the great waters . . .<sup>35</sup>

In this legend, note again the "world-holding sea", and a reference to man coming from the earth. The Hopi Indians, also a Pueblo tribe, have a more detailed account of the creation of man, in which they say that man was formed from clay:

In the Underworld there was nothing but water; two women, Huruing Wuhti of the East and Huruing Wuhti of the West, lived in east and west houses. . . These deities decided to create land, and they divided the waters that earth might appear. Then from clay, they formed, first, birds . . . then animals . . . and finally men. . . At first the people lived in the Underworld in Paradisiac bliss, but the sin of licentiousness appeared, and they were driven forth. . .<sup>36</sup>

The Hopi, despite the fact that they ascribe creation to two women who form the birds and animals also from clay, have recorded an interesting side light, namely, that the original people not only lived a life of Paradisiac bliss, but that they were driven from this Paradise by the entrance of sin into the world. Also here again it reads, "there was nothing but water".

In the Athabascan group, the Navahos and Apaches, the Creator is symbolized as the raven. Information pointing to a common tradition of myths is meager; much of the description relates to his omnipotence, as can be seen from the following quotation from Brinton:

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<sup>35</sup>Cushing, Zuni Creation Myths, freely transcribed by Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) pp. 229. 230.

<sup>36</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) X, 187.



With singular unanimity, most of the northwest branches of this stock trace their descent from a raven, "a mighty bird, whose eyes were fire, whose glances were lightning, and the clapping of whose wings was thunder. On his descent to the ocean, the earth instantly rose and remained on the surface of the water. This omnipotent bird then called forth all variety of animals."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, as the investigation has proceeded from the Atlantic coast to the borders of California, covering an area including the West, Central, and East Algonkins, and their neighboring tribes and groups, this chapter closes. The following chapter will include the numerous and very important tribes of California, the oldest Indian group of North America, the Yuki, and, finally the Selish tribes of the Northwest.

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<sup>37</sup> Mackenzie, History of the Fur Trade and Richardson, Arctic Expedition, quoted by Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) pp. 228, 229.



### CHAPTER III

#### CREATION AMONG THE WEST COAST TRIBES

Of the Central Californian groups, the Maidu, the Yuki, and the Wintu will be the chief tribes under discussion. The inquiry will then turn north to the Thompson River Indians, and the whole of the Selish group in general.

"Dr. A.L. Kroeber, Professor at the University of California, published a long series of special studies, and finally summed up his results in an essay, Types of American Culture in California. He demonstrated that the tribes living in the central part of the state belong to the oldest and most primitive in all North America. Then, in two monographs, Indian Myths of South Central California and The Religion of the Indians of California, he showed that, contrary to the animistic and preanimistic theories of the late development of a high god, these very tribes had a clearly developed Supreme Being and an idea of a real creation much more decidedly than other Amerindian peoples, despite the relative great advances of the latter in other aspects of culture . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Kroeber describes the Central Californian region in general as follows:

In Central California there is always a true creation of the world, of mankind and its institutions. The conception of the creator is often quite lofty, and tricky exploits or defeats are usually not connected with him. Often there is an antithesis between this beneficent and truly divine creator and a secondary character, usually the Coyote, who in part cooperates with the Creator but in part thwarts him, being responsible for the death of mankind and other imperfections in the world

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<sup>1</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 188.



scheme.<sup>2</sup>

Father Schmidt continues to quote Dr. Kroeber's remarks concerning the Central Californian concept of their Creator. Dr. Kroeber adds, that instead "of a human divinity there is almost everywhere a true creator, a god who makes . . . Often he makes the world from the primitive water. Generally he also makes mountains and rivers. Usually he creates food. Almost always he creates men, and frequently he divides them by languages and localities . . .".<sup>3</sup>

In support of Dr. Kroeber's statements, the oldest tribe, the Yuki, of one of the oldest groups, the Central Californians, has left behind a wealth of data. The Yuki have the "Boy Consecration Ceremony", which, as with the East and West Algonkins, is a ceremony enacting the creation of the world. As a matter of fact, "in this ceremony the story of creation constitutes the chief subject matter of an instruction that embraces religion, ethics, and sociology . . .".<sup>4</sup> The High God of the Yuki religion, as Schmidt reports, "bears the name 'Thunder', 'Thunder-man', 'Thunder-head', . . . In the oldest Yuki religion this Supreme Being is invisible. . . He existed before all other beings and possesses unlimited powers. The highest of these is the power of creation by which he creates heaven and earth and all that it contains, especially men. One of their creation myths states formally that he created everything merely by his own will without

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<sup>2</sup>A.L. Kroeber, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology IV., quoted by Albert Muntzsch, Cultural Anthropology (New York: Bruce Publishing Co., c.1934) p. 214.

<sup>3</sup>A.L. Kroeber, as quoted by Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 189.

<sup>4</sup>Schmidt, Primitive Revelation (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1939) p. 171.



even pronouncing words.<sup>5</sup>

Fragments of two Yuki creation myths will be recorded here, and, for purposes of identification, will be listed as the first and second creation myths. This is the first creation myth of the Yuki-Kato as described by Father Schmidt:

It begins with a grandiose overture, thunder from the four cardinal points. In this myth the culture hero is present at the same time with the Supreme Being. But the Supreme Being alone commands and directs everything, including the culture hero. Together they make the wide-stretched vault of the sky and support it on four great pillars at the cardinal points; they make a way for the sun, openings for the rain and mist. The body of man is moulded out of clay. Wind and rain, sun and moon are not created till after man. Then comes a narrative of a great flood, in which all men and animals perish. Next, the legend describes, with an abundance of concrete details, how all animals and plants are created, and after finishing the whole work the Creator himself, accompanied by his faithful dog (every well-to-do Indian has his dog) walks through the world, highly satisfied with its beauty and usefulness, and saying to his dog: "The earth I made is good, my dog. My dog, we made it good!"<sup>6</sup>

As with the Wintu along the Sacramento River, this myth of the Yuki-Kato suggests a sort of re-creation after the great flood; with the Wintu, it is sometimes after the fall of man. These details of a later creation often are similar and sometimes identical with the details of the original creation as documented by other tribes. Note, as an illustration of this fact, in the preceding myth, "the legend describes, with an abundance of concrete details, how all animals and plants are created", and especially the fact that the Creator was "highly satisfied" with his creation's "beauty and usefulness". This same sentiment was expressed in the Arapho creation story, "after the creator saw what he had made, he was much pleased with its appearance", not

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<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) pp. 27. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 29. 30.



to speak of the Genesis account.

The second creation myth of the Yuki follows here with some omissions:

In the beginning there was nothing but water. All alone in the upper sky-world lived Tsenes, 'Thunder'. One day he heard the sound of crying and beside the trail he saw a baby wrapped in white leaves. He carried it home, and the infant grew so rapidly that in a few days it was full grown . . . This was Nagaloo (the Great Wanderer). One day Nagaloo looked down and beheld the world of water and he said to Tsenes: "What are you going to do about this? How shall we travel about?" "I don't know", replied Thunder, "but you have been talking about what you can do." So he took Nagaloo down, far away in the north at the edge of the water. No sooner had they touched ground than there stood beside them a woman. Thunder had caused her to be there. "Where did this woman come from?", asked Nagaloo. "I give her to you as your wife", was the answer. After a little while there stood with them a dog, which also was given them as a companion by Thunder. He told Nagaloo to train the dog. This was the beginning of the custom of training dogs. . . Out of a huge deer Thunder created the earth, and then disappeared. . . Nagaloo continued to beget children, but because they did not come fast enough Thunder made many people at one time. Soon the earth was populated, and the people spread over the entire land.<sup>7</sup>

Whether the statement of Thunder in the preceding myth, "I don't know", indicates that he was not omniscient, or whether it is a touch of irony as contrast to what Nagaloo claimed he could do, it is difficult to determine. At any rate, the second creation myth of the Yuki does contain the almost universal "In the beginning there was nothing but water", as well as the concept of a primeval pair, and the attribute of omnipotence in the Creator.

The creation myth of the Hooa tribes, the Atsugewi and the Achomawi, in Northeastern California, merely serves to emphasize the superior moral traits of the Silver Fox, the Creator, over against the baseness of his adversary, the Coyote.<sup>8</sup> So, with that brief note, the study will turn from Northeastern California to the Maidu of Northwestern California.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Albert Muntzsch, op. cit., p. 216.



The Maidu religion has points comparable to the Yuki, such as the Boy (and Girl) Consecration Ceremony, where, "in this case, too, the creation story constitutes the basis of an instruction in religion, ethics, and sociology."<sup>9</sup> But it also differs from the Yuki-Kato. The points on which they differ have been aptly brought out by Father Schmidt in his comparison of the two religions. The Maidu-Patwin differ on an essential point:

. . . Here to the Supreme Being, absolutely good and bountiful, is opposed a representative of evil, who always contrives and performs the contrary of all the good that the Creator intends to do for men; and because men finally follow this adversary, represented by the figure of the Coyote, we have here a veritable fall. . . The Creator is also the originator and warden of morality, and especially of sexual purity. He wished to prescribe to young men and women premarital chastity . . . Coyote, on the contrary, pleads for excessive sensuality. . . The Creator had decreed that men should not die. . . Coyote, however, insists that men should die. But after having succeeded in this design, he is punished by the Creator in a most characteristic way: he himself and his cherished only son are the first who undergo death. . . This religion exists in its purest and oldest form among the Northwest Maidu and especially the valley Maidu. . . Legends of similar character are to be found among the Hoca tribes of the Achomawi and the Atsugewi . . .<sup>10</sup>

The figure of the Creator among the Maidu has been described in the following terms:

The importance given in the Maidu mythology to the creation is another feature characteristic of the stock. . . They have not been content to assume a world already created, and ready for occupancy when the ancestors of mankind should reach it after an earlier sojourn elsewhere, as did to a great extent the tribes of the Southwest. . . Here the creation is a real beginning: beyond it, behind it, there is nothing. In the beginning was only the great sea, calm and unlimited, to which, down from the clear sky, the Creator came . . .<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Primitive Revelation (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., c.1939) p. 172.

<sup>10</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933) p. 32.

<sup>11</sup>R.B. Dixon, as quoted by Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) p. 189.



With this much attention given to, comparatively speaking, side issues, an examination of the creation myth itself, which parallels the Wintu as well as the Hooa cosmogonies, would be fitting at this point. Father Schmidt has recorded the creation myth of the Maidu-Patwin. Here it is in part; (the Creator is referred to as World-Chief):

In the beginning there was no sun, no moon, no stars. All was dark, and everywhere there was only water. A raft came floating on the water. It came from the north, and in it were two persons, Turtle and Peheipe . . . Then from the sky a rope of feathers was let down, and down the rope came World-Chief . . . His face was covered and was never seen, but his body shone like the sun. . . The Creator then caused Turtle to dive for some mud from the ground of the ocean. . . From the very little earth he had brought up under his nails, the Creator made the immensely big world. They came ashore, and Turtle said: "Can't you make a light so that I can see?" then the Creator said: "Look that way to the east! I am going to tell my sister to come up." Then it began to grow light, and day began to break. . . After the sun went down, the Herald began to cry and shout again, and it grew very dark. World-Chief said: "I will tell my brother to come up." Then the moon arose. . . Then he called the stars each by its name, and they came out. Then he made a very large tree which had twelve different kinds of acorns. (This means the year and its twelve months). . . the Creator called the birds and made trees for them, and then made animals from pieces of mud. . . The Creator said: "I am going to make people". . . He took dark red earth, mixed it with water, and made two figures, one a man, and one a woman. . .<sup>12</sup>

In this cosmogony of the Maidu-Patwin, there are several details that are common to a number of creation myths. First, there is the very common, "everywhere there was only water". Secondly, though the Creator does not create the earth from nothing, he appears to have created the sun, moon, and the stars in that manner. Finally, but not least important, the Creator makes man from the earth, and not man only, but female too, the primeval pair, as found in numerous cosmogonies, as well as the record of Genesis.

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<sup>12</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933) pp. 34-36.



The Maidu have compared to the Wintu Indians. Alexander relates that "the Maidu Earthmaker has close parallels among the neighboring tribes, perhaps the most exalted being Ollelbi, of the Wintun".<sup>13</sup> The strongest of these parallels lies in the comparison of the Creators, Earthmaker of the Maidu and Ollelbi of the Wintu, and in the comparison of the force of evil, the Coyote being labeled Sedit in Wintun mythology. Concerning the authenticity of the Wintun myths, Curtin wrote that, "no Wintu has been converted to Christianity; hence the faith of the nation is undimmed, and its adherence to primitive religion unweakened".<sup>14</sup> When Jeremiah Curtin wrote this, shortly before the turn of the twentieth century, there were approximately five hundred Wintus remaining of a probable ten or twenty thousand that existed around 1850.<sup>15</sup> Curtin had explored the whole Sacramento River valley, and appears as well qualified to make such a statement as any of his day.

Their concept of Creator, Ollelbi, has been very aptly described by Curtin:

The word "Ollelbi" is formed of three etymological elements: ol, up; el, in; bi, dwelling or sitting, -- dwelling on high. . . Ollelbi lives in the highest part of the sky; with him are the best of the first people. From his beautiful house, Ollepanti Hlut, he sees everything on earth . . .<sup>16</sup>

The first thing that we know of Ollelbi is that he was in Ollepanti.

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<sup>13</sup> H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) X, 220.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah Curtin, Creation Myths of Primitive America (London: Williams and Norgate, c.1898) p. 492.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 488.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. xxx. (Introduction).



Whether he lived in another place is not known, but in the beginning he was in Olelpanti (on the upper side), the highest place. He was in Olelpanti before there was anything down here on earth. . .<sup>17</sup>

Here there are already several hints of a common tradition. Consider the Creator as one who "lives in the highest part of the sky", or the statement that he sees everything, or that he existed "before there was anything down here on earth". The declaration that "with him are the best of the first people" compares interestingly with the angels of the Old Testament account.

The Wintu creation myths are too lengthy to be investigated here, and, in addition to that fact, the first creation myth of the Yuki proves to be quite similar, particularly with the catastrophe intervening and a post-creation following. There is usually a primal water covering the earth, a record of the first inhabitants, the idea of a fall and/or a disaster, and a re-creation. In the myth of Norwanchakus and Keriha, "the two brothers Norwanchakus and Keriha were on this earth before any place or thing had a name . . . When the brothers started, they could not see well. There was no sun then; there was only a kind of dim twilight."<sup>18</sup> In this fragment of the beginning of a myth, there is an interesting detail about the original form of light that existed, undoubtedly before the creation of the sun. Other myths relate the creation of the sun; few refer to the type of light that existed prior to that time.

One of the points of comparison between the Wintu and the Maldu cosmogonies was the figure of the Coyote. Curtin sets forth a description of

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 212.



Sedit, the Wintun Coyote. His reference to the Hus brothers is a reference to a myth of the Wintu entitled, Sedit and the Two Brothers Hus:

Sedit was in favor of death for men, and gives his reasons. It cannot be said that he brought death into the world, but he stopped the work which would have kept it out. His discourse with the Hus brothers is curious; . . . the comparison of this conversation with the account of Adam and Eve before and after the fall is not without interest. The critical, unbelieving, disobedient Sedit, who is so willing to make life in the world varied and interesting through death, . . . is brought out in good relief. . . The Coyote is very prominent in the mythology of every region where he is found. The basis of his character is the same in all myths that I have collected. He is a tremendous glutton, boastful, talkative, cunning, exceptionally inclined to the other sex, full of curiosity, a liar, a trickster, deceiving most adroitly . . . He comes to grief frequently because of his passions and his peculiar qualities. He . . . has points in common with the devil . . .<sup>19</sup>

With this side light on the Wintun Coyote, the inquiry proceeds to the Wishosk tribe of the West Coast. The Wishosk Creator is outstanding, since he apparently creates by merely speaking. Here is creatio ex nihilo as is found in Genesis, a dignified creation by a Creator, not as the Maidu conceived of the World-Chief, but a Creator-God who used no tools and formed things by the spreading out of his hands. Among the Wishosk the Creator is known as Gudatrigakwitl:

When Gudatrigakwitl wanted to make people, he said, "I want fog." Then it began to be foggy. Gudatrigakwitl thought: "Noone will see it when the people are born." Then he thought: "Now I wish people to be all over, broadcast. I want it to be full of people and full of game." Then the fog went away. Noone had seen them before, but now they were there.<sup>20</sup>

Among the Selish tribes of the Northwest there is recorded a Supreme Being, a Creator of the universe as well as the earth. There is also an account of a primal substance covering the entire earth before creation, in

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 505. 506.

<sup>20</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) p. 229.



this case water also; there is an account of a primitive couple, and two details very similar to those found in Genesis, the record of the Creator forming man from earth and breathing on him to give him life, and the idea of woman being created from a part of man's body. These last two details are seldom, if ever, found in the creation myths of America. Father Schmidt tells of the Creator of the Selish:

The Supreme Being, whose proper name is Amotken, is called the Old One. . . His power is the highest, and there is no other being whose power could even be remotely compared with his . . . He is the Creator of the whole world, not only of the earth. The north-east group says that he has created the world "for his pleasure and his satisfaction and to fill out a gap in the waste desert of water of the old ocean below" . . . In the north-east group we have a direct report that God formed men from the earth and breathed on them, whereupon they lived. . . the idea of the primitive couple of parents of mankind is realized only in the north-east group, where the Creator made a man who was also a wolf, and from his tail his wife was made.<sup>21</sup>

The Thompson River Indians are a tribe of the Selish group. Muntsoh corroborates the data furnished by Father Schmidt, also supporting the authenticity of their myths in the following words:

The myths of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia . . . also indicate the existence of a beneficent creator and Supreme Being in the belief of this Northwestern tribe. Nor do these myths betray Christian influence, which is ruled out by our knowledge of the time when white men first came to this tribe.<sup>22</sup>

In the concluding paragraphs on the North American Indians, and the natives of California in particular, the conclusions that Father Schmidt has drawn, appear, as far as evidence is available, the most tenable. In the concluding portion of his book, High Gods in North America, he expresses the fol-

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<sup>21</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) pp. 114. 115.

<sup>22</sup>Albert Muntsoh, op. cit., p. 217.



lowing opinions on the three "High God" religions, those of the Selish, Algonkin, and North-Central California tribes. This quotation is concerning the dating of their immigration into America:

These religions, however, are not . . . contemporaneous. . . Beginning with the more recent, we have to do with the religions of the Inland Selish. . . Then follow the Algonkins. . . Last and oldest are the North-Central Californians. . . The more recent of these is the East-Central group of the Maidu-Patwin. . . The older of the Central Californian groups, and the oldest of all in North America, is then the West-Central California group of the Yuki-Kato. . .<sup>23</sup>

With this chronology in mind, it is highly interesting to note the comparative results he has found after investigating the creation myths of the Amerindians:

Of quite extraordinary importance in these religions is the idea of creation: of creation in a manner which strongly contradicts all evolutionistic principles. This idea of creation does not grow and develop in course of time to greater heights, but, on the contrary, it diminishes in vigour and amplitude in the more recent, that is, the Selish tribes, and it is clearer and stronger in the oldest of these religions, the North-Central Californians. . . It is in the oldest of all these religions, that of the Yuki, that we find the highest form of this idea, the creatio ex nihilo, and it is in the two oldest religions, that of the North-Central Californians and that of the Algonkins, that this idea stands in the foreground and forms the principle object of their great religious ceremonies instituted by the Supreme Being himself.<sup>24</sup>

As a final overview of the origin of the American Indians, the possibility of their creation myths coming from a common tradition, and the startling similarity between these myths and the Biblical record of Genesis, Father Schmidt has, very aptly and concisely, expressed his view in these final words:

. . . we have established the weighty fact that the very first men

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<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Schmidt, High Gods in North America (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933) p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 131.



who immigrated into this continent, the first true discoverers of America over what is now the Behring Strait, then a continuous land route, bore with them in their hearts the belief in one great God, creator of heaven and earth and man, and founder of the moral and social order of mankind.<sup>25</sup>

It is with this final impression that the investigation of the creation myths of North America is concluded, and the inquiry turns to the Latin American Indians, particularly the Quiché of Mayan Guatemala and the pre-Inca tribes of Peru.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 132. 133.



## CHAPTER IV

### CREATION MYTHS AMONG CENTRAL AMERICANS

As might be expected, the oldest civilizations among the tribes of the Latin American countries have the clearest conception of a Supreme Creator. For example, the Quiché of Mayan Guatemala have a very detailed account of their creation. The more modern cultures, the Aztec of Mexico and the Inca of Peru, on the contrary, have a rather hazy concept of a Supreme Being piercing through the complex polytheism of their day.

The investigation of the Indian tribes of Central America will start with the various tribes (and layers of culture) of Mexico, will give brief recognition to several of the other groups of Central America, and, finally, dwell for a longer period on the Quiché Indians.

As pointed out already, the Aztec is a relatively late culture in the history of the Indians of Mexico. As a matter of fact, the Chichimecs, the Acolhuans or the Tezcucans, and the Toltecs were all earlier Nahuatlán tribes.<sup>1</sup> But through this mass of borrowed and native deities there can be discerned the original concept of a Supreme Being. As Lewis Spence informs:

Through all the confusion of a mythology second only in richness to those of Egypt and Hellas can be traced the idea of a supreme creator, a "god behind the gods". This was not the sun, but an Allfather, addressed by the Mexican nations as "the God by whom we live"; "omnipotent, that knoweth all thoughts, and giveth all gifts"; "invisible, incorporeal, one God, of perfect perfection and purity".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 110.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis Spence, The Mythologies of Ancient Mexico and Peru (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1907) p. 12.



James Freeman Clarke, writing about the Aztec religion, said, "Exactly as in the Brahmanic and Egyptian systems, there was the conception of one Supreme Being, only partially eclipsed by the later polytheism".<sup>3</sup>

The authenticity of these creation myths and reports concerning the similarities in these beliefs appear to be reliable. Besides having the word of the Spanish historians and "documentarians", Spence has made the following deduction:

We have already seen that underlying the mythology of the ancient Mexicans was the idea of a supreme being, a "Great Spirit". In the rites of confession and absolution particularly was this Being appealed to in prayer, and the similarity of these petitions to those offered up by themselves so impressed the monkish companions of the Spanish conquerors that their astonishment is very evident in their writings. It is unlikely that these priests would admit a soul of goodness in the evil thing it was their business to stamp out; and their testimony in this respect is of the highest value as evidence that the Aztec religion possessed at least some germ of eternal verities.<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate the Aztec idea of a Creator, in the migration myths of the Aztecs, it is related that "Lake Tezeuoo overflowed its banks for no cause; a rock which the king had ordered made into a sacrificial altar refused to be moved, saying to the workmen that the Lord of Creation would not suffer it . . ."<sup>5</sup> And in another instance, "they tell how Montezuma, coming forth from a cave dug by the Creator, led the Indian nations thence".<sup>6</sup> In these examples, the narrator of these myths, though animistic, indicates

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<sup>3</sup> James Freeman Clarke, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Spence, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 119.



at least that he has a concept of a creator. That is the minimum of knowledge of a Supreme Being. Among some of the following (and earlier) tribes, there is a much clearer concept.

Following a general geographical movement from north to south, there is found an interesting myth in the Pima tribe of Lower California. Alexander narrates this Piman cosmogony as told by a shaman of the Pima tribe:

"In the beginning there was nothing where now are earth, sun, moon, stars, and all that we see. Ages long the darkness was gathering, until it formed a great mass in which developed the spirit of the earth Doctor, who, like the fluffy whisp of cotton that floats up on the wind, drifted to and fro without support or place to fix himself. Conscious of his power, he determined to try to build an abiding place, so he took from his breast a little dust and flattened it into a oake. Then he thought within himself, 'Come forth, some kind of plant', and there appeared the creosote bush . . .". Assuredly this is an extraordinary genesis, with its conception of a primeval void and a fiat creation, to come from the untaught natives, and it is possible that mission teachings may have influenced its form, though the matter seems to be aboriginal. The story goes on with the creation of insects; then of a skydome . . . ; then of sun, moon, and stars . . . Next Earth Doctor created living beings. . . <sup>7</sup>

This is, indeed, one of the more remarkable creation myths, if it be true that the shaman was not under the influence of Christianity. As Alexander pointed out, there is a concept of the vast "nothingness" before creation, a feature that only rarely is found among the cosmogonies of the New World. (Amerindian cosmogonies generally start with the primal substance, water, covering the earth.) And the fiat creation, combined with creatio ex nihilo, strikes a familiar note, particularly when compared with the record of Genesis, "Let there be . . .". Though the general order of creation, as Alexander describes it, is somewhat different from the Biblical account, the detail that living beings were created last appears to remain the same in both

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<sup>7</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - North American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1916) X, 177.



cosmogonies.

To retrogress to the period of one of the earliest of the Nahuatlán tribes, the Chichimeo, Bernardino de Sahagún, noted historian of Mexico, says that "they had only a single god, not represented by any image, called Yoalli Ehecatl, that is to say, God invisible, impalpable, beneficent, protector, omnipotent, by whose strength alone the whole world lives, and who, by his sole knowledge, rules voluntarily all things."<sup>8</sup> Alexander continues to relate that "Yoalli Ehecatl ('Wind and Night' or 'Nightwind') is an epithet applied to Tezcatlipoca, who also is addressed as 'Creator of Heaven and Earth'."<sup>9</sup>

The Acolhuans (Tezcuacans), a group that came between the Chichimeos and the Aztecs historically, have a lament that expresses their trust in a divine Creator, as well as breathes the whole world-weary dolour of their Nahuatlán religion:

O King, inquiet and insecure, when thou art dead, thy vassals shall be destroyed, scattered in dark confusion; on that day rulership will no longer be in thy hand, but with God the Creator, All-Powerful.<sup>10</sup>

The king of Tezcuco seems to have agreed with his subjects, for he expresses the same sentiments in the following quotation from Clarke:

The king of Tezcuco, in Mexico, became tired of the idols of his kingdom, having prayed to them in vain for a son. "What are they", he cried, "but dumb stones without sense or power! They could not have made this

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<sup>8</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, Historia de los Cosas de la Nueva España, as quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 87.

<sup>9</sup> H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 87.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 110.



beautiful world; the sun, moon, and stars; the waters and trees; and all the countless creatures which inhabit the world. There must be some invisible and unknown God, the Creator of all things. He alone can console me in my sorrow, and take away my affliction." Therefore he erected a temple nine stories high, which he dedicated to the unknown God, the Cause of Causes. He seems to have repeated, without knowing it, the argument of Paul at Athens.<sup>11</sup>

Brinton, writing about the Tezucans, confirms this report given by Clarke, and adds a very interesting side light:

The central figure of Nahuatlan mythology is Quetzalcoatl . . . No one denies him to have been a god, the god of the air, highest deity of the Tezucans, in whose honor was erected the pyramid of Cholula, grandest monument of their race. . . he was born of a virgin in the land of Tula or Tlapallan, in the distant orient, and was high priest of that happy realm.<sup>12</sup>

Whether there is any significance to the statement that their God "was born of a virgin . . . in the distant Orient", it is difficult to say, and precarious to draw any definite conclusions. Though this may be entirely coincidence, there appears to be the possibility that this belief may be related to, if not identical, with the Christ of Christian belief. Spence says that Quetzalcoatl "was one of the older pre-Aztec gods of the Anahuac. He is sometimes represented as a being of white complexion and fair-bearded, with blue eyes."<sup>13</sup> Spence goes on to say how this influenced the reception given Cortes, and brought about the speedy surrender of Montezuma's forces. Montezuma thought the coming of Cortes was the return of Quetzalcoatl.<sup>14</sup>

To return to the main subject of inquiry, Spence states on another occasion that:

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<sup>11</sup>James Freeman Clarke, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>12</sup>Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) pp. 213. 214.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis Spence, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 74.



Quetzalcoatl stood for a worship which was eminently more advanced and humane than the degrading and sanguinary idolatry of which Hu-itzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca were the prime objects. That he was not of Aztec origin but a god of the Toltecs or of the elder peoples who had preceded them in Anahuac is proved by a myth of the Mexican nations, in which his strife with Tezcatlipoca is related.<sup>15</sup>

Alexander also avers that Quetzalcoatl was the principal deity of the Toltecs.<sup>16</sup>

The Toltecs divided the creation into a number of epochs or ages, or rather, to be more exact, each epoch consisted of a creation and a disaster, after which a new epoch marked a new creation. Alexander describes this situation in the Toltec mythology, and also points out that Quetzalcoatl is clearly the Creator:

Each epoch begins on the first day of Tochtli, and the god Quetzalcoatl figures as the creator. . . first, the Sun of Water, which is also the Age of Giants; second, the Sun of Winds, ending with the transformation into apes; third, the Sun of Fire; fourth, the Sun of Famine, terminating with a rain of blood and the fall of Tollan. Four Suns passed, and a fifth Sun, leading forward to a fifth eventual destruction, seems, most authorities agree, to represent the orthodox Mexican myth. . . Quetzalcoatl . . . is clearly the Toltec Zeus.<sup>17</sup>

In southern Mexico the Mixtecs, with their picture writing, have preserved a cosmogony much more revealing than that of the Toltecs. Gregorio Garcia records the first part of the Mixtec creation myth:

In the year and in the day of obscurity and darkness, when there were as yet no days nor years, the world was a chaos sunk in darkness, and

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 106.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 94.



a water covered the slime and ooze that the earth then was.<sup>18</sup>

Here there is the account of the primeval substance, very vividly described, which the North American Indians so unanimously agreed upon. With this beginning the Mixtecs continued to speak of their "Creator-of-All-Things", who was most likely the same as Quetzalcoatl of the Tezoucan, Zapotec, and Toltec mythology. Alexander affirms this conclusion, and also adds that this one Creator-God of all these groups was not only the Creator of all things, but was himself uncreated:

It is probable that this Mixtec Creator-of-All-Things was the same deity as he who was known to their Zapotec kindred as Coqui-Xee or Coqui-Gilla (Lord of the Beginning), of whom it is said that "he was the creator of all things and was himself uncreated". Seler is of the opinion that Coqui-Xee is a spirit of "the beginning" in the sense of dawn and the east and the rising sun, and that since he is also known as Piye-Tao, or "The Great Wind", he is none other than the Zapotec Quetzalcoatl, who also is an increate creator.<sup>19</sup>

As the inquiry into Mexican creators and creation myths is hurriedly brought to a close, it is fitting that one of the simpler, yet one of the clearest, as far as comparing similarities with Genesis is concerned, tales be recorded here. Herrera reports on Tuoupacha, the deity of the Tarascans. He discloses that "they hold him to be the creator of all things, that he gives life and death, good and evil fortune, and they call upon him in their tribulations, gazing toward the sky where they believe him to be."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Gregorio de Garcia, Origen de los Indios del Nuevo Mundo y Indias Occidentales, as freely transcribed by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 85. and Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) p. 230.

<sup>19</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 87.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 85, quoting Herrera, and Antonia de Tordesillas, "Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano . . .", in Quatro Decadas Desde el Ano de 1492 Hasta el de 1531.



Alexander adds that Tuoupacha "first created heaven and earth and hell; then he formed a man and a woman of clay. . . but the god sent a flood, from which he preserved a certain priest, Texpi, and his wife, with seeds and with animals, floating in an ark-like log."<sup>21</sup> The Tarascans have preserved a detail seldom found in Amerindian creation myths, that the Creator created hell, along with earth and heaven. A detail familiar from the Muskokis, Hopi, Yuki, Maidu, and Selish myths is: the Creator "formed a man and a woman of clay". It is noteworthy that this is found comparatively often among the North American Indians, but seldom in Mexico. Therefore this example proves to be quite outstanding. It is also worthy of notice that there is a primeval pair, and, very definitely, a male and female, both formed from clay. The data on the flood, and Texpi, undoubtedly a reference to the Biblical Noah and the great deluge, provide an interesting side light at this point, and suggest another investigation that could be made, not without profit, among the Amerindians.

Bypassing Guatemala for the moment, the Costa Rica aborigines, the Guaymis, have, as Melendez found, a creation myth explaining the origin of the world. Melendez cites that:

The creation myth of the Guaymis of Costa Rica related that the mysterious being Nonoomala formed the world and the waters, but they were in darkness and clouds. Wading into the river he met and fecundated the water-sprite Rutbe, who bore him twins . . . one becoming the sun, the other the moon, the twin lights of the world.<sup>22</sup>

In this rather crude tale, there is, once more, the reference to a world

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<sup>21</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 85.

<sup>22</sup>Juan Melendez, Tesoros Verdaderos de las Indias, as quoted by Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) p. 231.



originally cloaked in darkness.

Peter Martyr has devoted a large section of a book (listed below) to the description of the beliefs and rites of the Isthmians, the Indians of the region where the Isthmus of Panama joins the continent. He wrote concerning their belief in a Creator, "when the Spaniards asked them to what divinity they addressed their prayers, they responded that it is to the god who created the heavens, the sun, the moon, and all existing things; and from whom every good thing proceeds . . .".<sup>23</sup>

Though the information is meager for comparative studies, at any rate, there is recorded, even among the tribes where data is weak, the knowledge generally that these Amerindians held a belief in a Supreme Creator, and, as far as evidence is available, this belief is primitive and aboriginal, uninfluenced by later mission teachings. With this brief note, and, unfortunately meager information on the Central American tribes, the investigation turns to the Quiché of Guatemala, and the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Mayan Quiché.

The Popol Vuh has been subtitled, the Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya, and it undoubtedly is that. For, as far as can be determined, it was first transcribed by a very intelligent and literary Quiché Indian in the middle of the sixteenth century, more than likely, from the oral traditions of the people. This original manuscript, written in Quiché (but in Latin script), has since been lost. But, in the meantime, this now lost manuscript was copied at the end of the seventeenth century by Father Francisco Ximenez,

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<sup>23</sup>Peter Martyr, De Orbe Novo, quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 191.



a parish priest of the village of Santo Tomas Chichicastenango, in the mountainous region of Guatemala. Ximenez's copy is still available, and was used by Adrian Recinos in his recent (1947) translation of the Quiché into Spanish.<sup>24</sup>

Bancroft in his The Native Races made the following statement about the Popol Vuh:

Of all American peoples, the Quichés of Guatemala have left us the richest mythological legacy. Their description of the creation as given in the Popol Vuh, which may be called the national book of the Quichés, is, in its rude strange eloquence and poetic originality, one of the rarest relics of aboriginal thought.<sup>25</sup>

Alexander, in his introductory statements to a long quotation from the Popol Vuh, pays the highest compliments to this great legend:

The Popol Vuh is the most striking and instructive of the myth-records of primitive America. Other legends are as comprehensive in scope, as varied in material, and as dramatic in form; but no other, in anything like the measure of this document, combines with these qualities the element of critical consciousness, giving the flavor of philosophical reflection which lifts the narrative from the level of mere tale-telling into that of literature . . .<sup>26</sup>

The Popol Vuh is actually a work divided into four parts, and the creation account, for which it has become so famous, forms chiefly the first part of this book. The remaining three parts are devoted to the history of the Quiché and the chronology of their kings down to the year 1550.

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<sup>24</sup> Popol Vuh, English version by Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley, from the Spanish translation of the Quiché by Adrian Recinos (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, c.1950) p. ix. (Foreword).

<sup>25</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, The Native Races, as quoted in the Popol Vuh (Norman, Oklahoma: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, c.1950) p. xi. (Preface).

<sup>26</sup> H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) p. 159.



Its own preamble will present the reasons why this anonymous Indian recorded the traditions of his people:

This is the beginning of the old traditions of this place called Quiché. . . This we shall write now under the law of God and Christianity; we shall bring it to light because the Popol Vuh, as it is called, cannot be seen any more, in which was clearly seen the coming from the other side of the sea and the narration of our obscurity, and our life was clearly seen. The original book, written long ago, existed, but its sight is hidden to the searcher and the thinker. Great were the descriptions and the account of how all the sky and earth were formed, how it was formed and divided into four parts; how it was partitioned, and how the sky was divided; and the measuring-cord was brought, and it was stretched in the sky and over the earth, on the four angles, on the four corners, as was told by the Creator and the Maker, the Mother and Father of Life, of all created things, he who gives breath and thought . . . he who meditates on the goodness of all that exists in the sky, on the earth, in the lakes and in the sea.<sup>27</sup>

With this introduction the Quiché author launches into an account of the first things. Because of its great length, the author has quoted the creation legend only in part. The following is the cosmogony of the Quichés as recorded in Part One and Part Three of the Popol Vuh:

This is the account of how all was in suspense, all calm, in silence; all motionless, still, and the expanse of the sky was empty. This is the first account, the first narrative. There was neither man, nor animal, birds, fishes, crabs, trees, stones, caves, ravines, grasses, nor forests; there was only the sky. The surface of the earth had not appeared. There was only the calm sea and the great expanse of the sky. There was nothing brought together, nothing which could make a noise, nor anything which might move, or tremble, or could make noise in the sky. There was nothing standing; only the calm water, the placid sea, alone and tranquil. Nothing existed. There was only immobility and silence in the darkness, in the night.

Only the Creator, the Maker, Tepeu, Guzumatz, the Forefathers, were in the water surrounded with light. . . By nature they were great sages and great thinkers. In this manner the sky existed and also the Heart of Heaven, which is the name of God and thus He is called. . . Then they planned the creation, and the growth of trees and the thickets and

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<sup>27</sup> Popol Vuh, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, c.1950) pp. 77-80.



the birth of life and the creation of man. Thus it was arranged in the darkness and in the night by the Heart of Heaven who is called Huracan. Then they conferred about life and light, what they would do so that there would be light and dawn, who it would be who would provide food and sustenance.

Thus let it be done! Let the emptiness be filled! Let the water recede and make a void, let the earth appear and become solid; let it be done. Thus they spoke. Let there be light, let there be dawn in the sky and on the earth! There shall be neither glory nor grandeur in our creation and formation until the human being is made, man is formed. So they spoke. Then the earth was created by them. So it was, in truth, that they created the earth. Earth! they said, and instantly it was made. Like the mist, like a cloud, and like a cloud of dust was the creation, when the mountains appeared from the water; and instantly the mountains grew. Only by a miracle, only by magic art were the mountains and valleys formed; and instantly the groves of cypresses and pines put forth shoots together on the surface of the earth. . . . First the earth was formed; the mountains and the valleys; the currents of the water were divided, the rivulets were running freely between the hills, and the water was separated when the high mountains appeared. Thus was the earth created, when it was formed by the Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth, as they are called who first made it fruitful, when the sky was in suspense, and the earth was submerged in water. So it was that they made perfect the work, when they did it after thinking and meditating upon it.

Then they made the small wild animals, the guardians of the woods, the spirits of the mountains the deer, the birds, pumas, jaguars, serpents, snakes, vipers, guardians of the thickets. And the Forefathers asked: "Shall there be only silence and calm under the trees, under the vines? It is well that hereafter there be someone to guard them." So they said when they meditated and talked. Promptly the deer and the birds were created. Immediately they gave homes to the deer and birds. "You, deer, shall sleep in the fields by the river bank and in the ravines. Here you shall be amongst the thicket, amongst the pasture; in the woods you shall multiply, you shall walk on four feet and they will support you. Thus be it done!" So it was that they spoke. Then they also assigned homes to the birds big and small. "You shall live in the trees and in the vines. There you shall make your nests; there you shall multiply; there you shall increase in the branches of the trees and in the vines." So it was said to the deer, the birds, pumas, jaguars, and serpents.

. . . "Let us make him who shall nourish and sustain us! What shall we do to be invoked, in order to be remembered on earth? We have already tried with our first creations, our first creatures; but we could not make them praise and venerate us. So, then let us try to make obedient, respectful beings who will nourish and sustain us." Thus they spoke. Then was the creation and the formation. Of earth, of mud, they made man's flesh. But they saw that it was not good. It melted away, it was soft, did not move, had no strength, it fell down, it was limp, it



could not move its head, its face fell to one side, its sight was blurred, it could not look behind. At first it spoke, but it had no mind. Quickly it soaked in the water and could not stand. And the Creator and the Maker said: "Let us try again because our creatures will no be able to walk nor multiply. Let us consider this," they said. Then they broke up and destroyed their work and their creation.

. . . "So may it be", they answered when they spoke. And instantly the figures were made of wood. They looked like men, talked like men, and populated the surface of the earth. They existed and multiplied; they had daughters, they had sons, these wooden figures; but they . . . did not remember their Creator, their Maker. . . Therefore they no longer thought of their Creator nor their Maker, nor of those who made them and cared for them. These were the first men who existed in great numbers on the face of the earth.

Immediately the wooden figures were annihilated, destroyed, broken up, and killed. A flood was brought about by the Heart of Heaven; a great flood was formed which fell on the heads of the wooden creatures. Of tzitò, the flesh of man was made, but when woman was fashioned by the Creator and the Maker, her flesh was made of rushes. These were the materials the Creator and the Maker wanted to use in making them. But those that they had made, that they had created, did not think, did not speak with their Creator, their Maker. And for this reason they were killed, they were deluged. . .

It was cloudy and twilight then on the face of the earth. There was no sun yet. Nevertheless, there was a being called Vucub-Caquix who was very proud of himself. The sky and the earth existed, but the faces of the sun and the moon were covered. And he (Vucub-Caquix) said: ". . . I shall now be great above all the beings created and formed. I am the sun, the light, the moon", he exclaimed. "Great is my splendor . . .". His only ambition was to exalt himself and to dominate. And all this happened when the flood came because of the wooden people. Now we shall tell how Vucub-Caquix was overthrown and died, and how man was made by the Creator and the Maker . . .

Here, then, is the beginning of when it was decided to make man, and when what must enter into the flesh of man was sought. And the Forefathers, the Creators and the Makers, who were called Tepeu and Guoumatz said: "The time of dawn has come, let the work be finished, and let those who are to nourish and sustain us appear, the noble sons, the civilized vassals; let man appear, humanity, on the face of the earth." Thus they spoke. They assembled, came together and held council in the darkness and the night; then they sought and discussed, and here they reflected and thought. In this way their decisions came clearly to light and they found and discovered what must enter into the flesh of man. It was just before the sun, the moon, and the stars appeared over the Creators and the Makers.



From Paxil, from Cayala, as they are called, came the yellow ears of corn and the white ears of corn. . . And thus they found the food, and this was what went into the flesh of created man, the made man; this was his blood; of this was the blood of man made. So the corn entered (into the formation of man) by the work of the Forefathers. . . After that they began to talk about the creation and the making of our first mother and father; of yellow corn and of white corn they made their flesh; of corn-meal dough they made the arms and the legs of man. Only dough of corn meal went into the flesh of our first fathers, the four men, who were created.

These are the names of the first men who were created and formed: the first man was Balam-Quitze, the second, Balam-Acab, the third, Mahuoutah, and the fourth was Iqui-Balam. These are the names of our first mothers and fathers. It is said that they only were made and formed, that they had no mother, they had no father. They were only called men. They were not born of woman, nor were they begotten by the Creator nor by the Maker, nor by the Forefathers, Tepeu and Gucumatz. And as they had the appearance of men, they were men; they talked, conversed, saw and heard, walked, grasped things; they were good and handsome men, and their figure was the figure of a man. They were endowed with intelligence. . . In this way were created and formed our grandfathers, our fathers, by the Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth.

Then their wives had being, and their women were made. God himself made them carefully. And so, during sleep, they came, truly beautiful, their women, at the side of Balam-Quitze, Balam-Acab, Mahuoutah, and Iqui-Balam. There were their women when they awakened, and instantly their hearts were filled with joy because of their wives.<sup>28</sup>

And so the legend of the Quiche continues. Without a doubt, this is a remarkable cosmogony. Its form and order is reminiscent of the creation myths of the Wintu, yet the style and insight of the Popol Vuh is so outstanding as to make the two incomparable. And for the student of comparative religion, particularly, this record is invaluable. Though the reference, continually, is to "the Creator, the Maker, and the Forefathers", a bold denial of one Supreme Creator, there are innumerable details that very definitely corroborate other accounts, and point to a common tradition.

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<sup>28</sup>Popol Vuh (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, c.1950) pp. 81-90, 93, 94, 165-170.



Here there is definitely a fiat creation, and creatio ex nihilo. For the whole first section is devoted to describing how nothing existed before creation, how utterly void it was. The creation itself is accomplished by "Let it be done!". The very words of Genesis are here duplicated: "Let there be light". The primeval water covering the earth, virtually every detail of the North American myths, which was wide-spread or similar to the Genesis account, is found in this famous legend. The creation of man from the earth, though discarded as the mode of creation for the final people who were to inhabit the earth, is recorded in the Popol Vuh. The creation of woman, as man lay asleep, the existence of a veritable devil in the figure of Vucub-Caquix, the perfection of the final creation, all are recorded in this astonishing creation myth.

Thus closes an, sometimes brief, sometimes revealing, investigation of the creation myths of Mexico and Latin America. The following chapter will form an inquiry into, chiefly, the myths of the Guinea and Colombia tribes, but most important of all, the ancient pre-Aztec aborigines of Peru.



## CHAPTER V

### CREATION MYTHS IN SOUTH AMERICA

The investigation of South American creation myths will start with the Indians of Colombia, the Tunja, Chibcha, Uitoto, and Salivan tribes; it will proceed to include the Caribs of Guiana, the Arawak, Warrau, and Aekawoi tribes; from there the inquiry will touch the Chaco of Argentine, and go into detail on the concept of Creator in Peru.

As was stated in the second chapter, the Fuegians, natives of Tierra del Fuego, were weak in creation myths, due to the fact that here, as well as near the Arctic, the aborigines made long and wide migrations, lived in extreme isolation, and were thrust into wretched environments by the later and stronger peoples. These factors caused them to loose some elements of their religion; with the Fuegians it happened to be the concept of creation.

The Amazons of Brazil likewise seem to have lost the idea of creation. In this respect they are similar to the natives of Tierra del Fuego. Thus Alexander wrote concerning the Amazons:

Purahas's translation of Cardim begins: "It seemeth that this people had no knowledge of the beginning and creation of the world, but of the deluge it seemeth that they have some notice". This is a fair characterization of the general cosmogonical ideas of the South American wild tribes. There is seldom any notion of creation; there is universally, it would seem, some legend of a catyolysm . . . offering such general analogies to the Noachian story as naturally to suggest to men unacquainted with comparative mythology the inference that the tale of Noah was indeed the source of all.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 311.



Alexander's statement above, that "there is seldom any notion of creation", must taken very lightly, and then, only as a very general remark concerning South American natives. For he, himself, relates a number of South American creation myths, as well as describes their idea of a Creator. But this statement is particularly applicable to the Amazon and Fuegian tribes.

As a general overview of the South American tribes, Brinton relates that:

According to a myth extensively disseminated among the Caribs, Arawacks, Warraus, Carayas, and other South American tribes, in the beginning of things sky and earth were as one, and man abode within the earth in a joyous realm, where death and disease were unknown, and even the trees never rotted but lived on forever. One day the ruler of that happy realm walking forth discovered the surface of the world as we know it, but returning warned his people that though sunlight was there, so also were decay and death. Some, however, went thither, and the present unhappy race of men are their descendants, while others still dwell in gladness far below.<sup>2</sup>

Though this is not, strictly speaking, a creation myth, there is the concept of an original Paradise as is found in Genesis, and an attempt at an explanation of the present mortal and finite condition of man.

To illustrate how strong Alexander's statement was, Wallis, Radin, and Alexander himself will furnish data showing that the Salivan, Uitoto, Tunja, and Chiboha tribes of Colombia all have an idea of a Creator, as well as creation legends among the last three. To begin with the first, "the Salivan of Colombia believe in a supreme deity, Puru, the creation power from whom all things visible and all natural forces originated. . . Natural forces, wind, fire, earthquakes, and thunder, and other forces operative in the nat-

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<sup>2</sup>Ehrenreich, Die Karayastämme, as quoted by Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) pp. 265. 266.



ural and human world, emanate from Puru."<sup>3</sup>

The Uitoto refer to their Creator as Mainema, and have an account of creation that is rather weird, judged by Christian standards. But this is, assuredly, creatio ex nihilo:

In the beginning there was nothing but mere appearance, nothing really existed. It was but a phantasm, an illusion that our father touched; something mysterious it was that he grasped. Nothing existed. Through the agency of a dream, our father, He-Who-Is-Appearance-Only, Mainema, pressed the phantasm to his breast and then was sunk in thought. Not even a tree existed that might have supported this phantasm, and only through his breath did Mainema hold this illusion attached to a thread of a dream. He tried to discover what was at the bottom of it, but he found nothing. "I have attached that which was non-existent", he said. . . . Then our father . . . tied the emptiness to the dream-thread and pressed the magical glue-substance upon it. Thus by means of his dream did he hold it like the fluff of raw cotton. He seized the bottom of the phantasm and stamped upon it repeatedly, allowing himself to rest upon the earth of which he had dreamt.<sup>4</sup>

"A true creation-story (as distinguished from tales of origin through generation) was told also by the people of Tunja. In the beginning all was darkness and fog, wherein dwelt the caciques of Ramiriqui and of Sogamozo, nephew and uncle. From yellow clay they fashioned men, and from an herb they created women; but since the world was still unilluminated, after enjoining worship upon their creatures, they ascended to the sky. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Here, with the Tunja tribes of Colombia, though there is the belief that there were two creators, they also imply a chaos at the beginning, and state a very

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson Wallis, Religion in Primitive Society (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1939) p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> K.T. Preuss, "Die Höchste Gottheit bei den Kulturarmen Völkern", in Psychologische Forschungen II, as quoted by Paul Radin, Primitive Religion (New York: Viking Press, c.1937) p. 265.

<sup>5</sup> H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 200.



significant detail, quite familiar to us at this stage of the investigation, -- the creation of man from the earth. This is not only a creation myth, but one pointing to a common tradition as well.

Finally, the Chibcha, like other American peoples, recognized a Creator. They called him Chiminigagua, and Fray Pedro Simon, author of Noticias Hist-  
orales, refers to him (Chiminigagua) as the Supreme Being among the Chibcha. This is their account of creation:

In the beginning all was darkness, for light was imprisoned in a great house in charge of a being called Chiminigagua . . . omnipotent, ever-good, and lord of all things. After creating huge black birds, to whom he gave the light, commanding them to carry it in their beaks until all the world was illumined and resplendent, Chiminigagua formed the Sun, the Moon (to be the Sun's wife and companion), and the rest of the universe.<sup>6</sup>

Among the Caribs of Guiana, there existed at one time eighty-three unrelated stocks.<sup>7</sup> Among such a varied group, there might be expected a confused conception of Creator and creation. As Brett describes them, this is true, and yet there is an overall concept of one Supreme Creator:

The aborigines of Guiana, in their naturally wild and untaught condition, have had a confused idea of the existence of one good and supreme Being, and of many inferior spirits, who are supposed to be of various kinds, but generally of malignant character. The Good Spirit they regard as the Creator of all, and as far as we can learn, they believe him to be immortal and invisible, omnipotent, and omniscient. . . .<sup>8</sup>

This Great Spirit has a different appellation with each tribe of Guiana.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 198, 199.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>8</sup> W.H. Brett, The Indian Tribes of Guiana, quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 256.



The Arawak tribes refer to him as Wa Marreta Kwonoi, "Our Maker"; the Warrau-Wapianas call him Kononattoo, which also means "Our Maker". His name among the Aekawoi Carib tribes is Mackonaima. The exact meaning of name, Mackonaima, is unknown, but he was a Creator-God and the hero of cosmogony among the Aekawoi Carib tribes.<sup>9</sup>

As Brinton pointed out previously, there is a myth of an original Paradise among the Caribs. Alexander has recorded this myth as told by the Caribs of Surinam:

In a time long past that even the grandmothers of our grandmothers were not yet born. . . the world was quite other than what it is today: the trees were forever in fruit; the animals lived in perfect harmony, and the little agouti played fearlessly with the beard of the jaguar; the serpents had no venom; the rivers flowed evenly, without drought or flood; and even the waters of cascades glided gently down from the high rocks. No human creature had as yet come to life . . .<sup>10</sup>

As was related, the Aekawoi make Mackonaima their Creator. Alexander tells of another myth of the Cariban stock in which Mackonaima figures as Creator:

. . . Makonaima, having created heaven and earth, sat on a silk-cotton-tree by a river, and cutting off pieces of bark, cast them about, those which touched the water becoming fish, and others flying in the air as birds, while from those that fell on land arose animals and men. . . a later addition, accounting for races of men: the Great Spirit Makonaima made a large mould, and out of this fresh, clean clay the white man stepped. After it got a little dirty the Indian was formed. . . the mould became black and unclean, and out of it walked the negro.<sup>11</sup>

This latter addition could have been the original creation story of the Caribs; it might truly be a bit of native imagination, or a later piece of borrowing. But it is interesting to note actually how many myths use the sub-

<sup>9</sup>Everard Im Thurn, Among the Indians of Guiana, as quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 258.

<sup>10</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 262.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 269. 271.



stance clay, or earth, for the creation of man. This detail would strike the unbiased observer as more than mere coincidence. That it proves a common tradition would be a precarious statement to make. But it is equally difficult, if not more so, to imagine that people all over the world just happened to come up with the same solutions to the age-old questions. It's noteworthy to look, for example, to the Chaco of Argentine. Alexander describes them as people who were, and still are, untouched by civilization. And yet among the Chaco, there is not merely the concept of a Creator, but the statement that man and woman were formed from clay. This is what Alexander has to say about the Chaco:

In the Chaco . . . to this day, are to be found tribes practically untouched by the influence of civilization -- tribes in the state which for untold centuries must have been that of the peoples of Central South America. . . The mythology of the Chaco tribes . . . is founded on the idea of a Creator, symbolized by the Beetle. First, the material universe was made. . . Afterward the Beetle formed a man and a woman from the clay which it threw up from its hole . . .<sup>12</sup>

With this brief, but significant note on the Chaco, the investigation now turns to the aborigines of Peru, the last group of Indians to be the subject of inquiry in this thesis.

The Incas of Peru had two Creators, Viracocha and Pachacamac. The worship of Viracocha appears to be the older of the two, Pachacamac being a later addition of the Incas. (Pachacamac, according to the Inca version, defeated Viracocha, and created a new world by making people into animals and creating new people).<sup>13</sup> That Viracocha was a pre-Inca Creator is point-

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 317. 323.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis Spence, op. cit., p. 50.



ed out by Brinton, when he relates that "Viracocha was the culture hero of the Aymara-Quichua stock",<sup>14</sup> and Spence, when he concludes that "we must then regard Viracocha as the god of a faith anterior to the sun-worship which obtained in Peru at the time of the Spanish conquest".<sup>15</sup> Sun-worship, though the official religion, and the religion always associated with Peru, was not the only religion of the Indians in Peru. Particularly with the intelligentsia, it was often the least popular religion. Murray says that "Sun worship, with Cuzco as its center, was the official religion, although there existed a monotheistic cult among the higher classes who worshipped the Creator-God".<sup>16</sup> This is verified by Clarke with the incident on which he reports:

It is related that about A.D. 1440, at a great religious council held in Peru, an Inca rose before the assembled multitude and said: "Many tell us that the Sun made all things. But he who makes must remain with what he makes; now many things happen when the Sun is absent, & therefore he cannot make all things. . . He is like an animal in harness, who has to go where he is driven, like an arrow which must go where it is sent by the archer. Therefore he, our Father and Master, the Sun, must have another Master greater than himself, who compels him to go his daily round without peace or rest." A name was, therefore invented for this Supreme Power, and a temple built for his worship near Callao, in which were no images nor sacrifices.<sup>17</sup>

And Alexander adds that:

Viracocha was not forgotten, even by the Incas who subordinated him officially to the Sun; and few passages in American lore are more

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<sup>14</sup>Daniel G. Brinton, The Myths of the New World. (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) p.210.

<sup>15</sup>Lewis Spence, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>16</sup>R.W. Murray, Man's Unknown Ancestors (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., c. 1943) p. 320.

<sup>17</sup>James Freeman Clarke, op. cit., p. 122.



striking than are the records of Inca doubt as to the Sun's divinity and power. Molina says of that very Inca to whom the vision of the crystal appeared that "he reflected upon the respect and reverence shown by his ancestors to the Sun, who worshipped it as a god; he observed that it never had any rest, and that it daily journeyed round the earth; and he said to those of his council that it was not possible that the Sun could be the God who created all things, for if he was, he would not permit a small cloud to obscure his splendour; and that if he was creator of all things, he would sometimes rest, and light up the whole world from one spot. Thus, it cannot be otherwise but there is someone who directs him, and this is the Pachayachachi, the Creator." Garcilasso (quoting Blas Valera) states that the Inca Tupac Yupangui likened the Sun rather to a tethered beast or to a shot arrow than to a free divinity, while Huayna Capac is credited with a similar judgement. In the prayers recorded by Molina, Viracocha is supreme, even over the Sun; and these petitions, it must be supposed, represent the deepest convictions of the Inca religion.<sup>18</sup>

Molina, Salcamayhua, Huaman, Poma, all give Inca prayers addressed to Viracocha -- prayers which are our best evidence for the character in which he was regarded. In the group recorded by Molina the deity appears as Lord of generation of plants and animals and humankind; and to him are addressed supplications for increase. But he is very clearly also, a supreme creator: "O conquering Viracocha! Ever-present Viracocha! Thou who art in the ends of the earth without equal! Thou gavest life and valour to men, saying, 'Let this be a man!' and to women, saying, 'Let this be a woman!' Thou madest them and gavest them being! Watch over them that they may live in health and peace. Thou who art in the high heavens, and among the clouds of the tempest, grant this with long life, and accept this sacrifice, O Creator!"<sup>19</sup>

Paul Radin differs as to which Viracocha or Pachacamac, was the Creator of the earliest people in Peru, when his opinion is compared with that of Brinton and Spence. He says that the earlier people called the Creator Pachacamac, and the Incas called him Viracocha. At any rate, he agrees that the

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<sup>18</sup> Garcilasso, El Inca, and Christóval de Molina, An Account of the Fables and Rites of the Incas, as quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c. 1920) XI, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Christóval de Molina, An Account of the Fables and Rites of the Incas, as quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c. 1920) XI, 236.



culture that Pizarro encountered, when the Spanish conquerors landed, was, like that of the Aztecs, built upon the ruins of the preceding civilization, and that the belief in a Supreme Creator, likewise, was a heritage from this predecessor.<sup>20</sup> He records a prayer in the form of a hymn, which the Incas intoned to Viracocha:

O Uiracocha! Lord of the universe,  
 Whether thou art male  
 Whether thou art female;  
 Lord of reproduction  
 Whatsoever thou may be.  
 O Lord of divination,  
 Where art thou?  
 Thou mayest be above,  
 Or perhaps around  
 Thy splendid throne and scepter.  
 Oh, hear me!  
 From the sky above,  
 In which thou mayest be;  
 From the sea beneath  
 In which thou mayest be;  
 Creator of the world,  
 Maker of all men;  
 Lord of all lords,  
 My eyes fail me,  
 For the sole desire to know thee.  
 Might I behold thee,  
 Might I know thee,  
 Might I consider thee,  
 Might I understand thee?  
 O look down upon me,  
 For thou knowest me.  
 The sun -- the moon --  
 The day -- the night --  
 Spring -- Winter,  
 Are not ordained in vain  
 By thee,                   21  
 O Uiracocha . . .

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<sup>20</sup>Paul Radin, The Story of the American Indian (New York: Boni & Liveright, c.1927) pp. 123. 124.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 124. 125.



Clarke reported previously that after the incident in the year 1440 A.D. the Incas built a temple for this Supreme Creator "in which there were no images nor sacrifices". Clarke does not say that this temple was built for Viracocha, in those words, but it appears from Brinton's remarks that this was one and the same edifice to which they both refer. Brinton is speaking of Viracocha in the following quotation:

. . . in their creed he was creator and possessor of all things. Lands and herds were assigned to other gods to support their temples, and offerings were heaped on their altars, but to him none. For, asked the Incas, "Shall the Lord and Master of the whole world need these things from us?" To him, says Acosta, "They did attribute the chief power and commandment over all things;" and elsewhere, "in all this realm the chief idoll they did worship was Viracocha, and after him the Sunne." . . . He himself constructed these luminaries and placed them in the sky, and then peopled the earth with its present inhabitants.<sup>22</sup>

The creation myth of the Peruvians has been briefly outlined by Spence:

The name Viracocha . . . signifies "Foam of the Water", thus alluding to the legend that the god had arisen out of the depths of Lake Titicaca. On his appearance from the sacred waters Viracocha created the sun, moon, and the stars, and mapped out for them the courses which they were to hold in the heavens. He then created men carved out of stone statues made by himself, and bade them to follow to Cuzco . . .<sup>23</sup>

Spence continues to say that Viracocha returned to Lake Titicaca and disappeared into the waters. And "the most ancient of the temples of Peru was that on the island of Titicaca, to which extraordinary veneration was paid. Everything in connection with it was sacred in the extreme . . ."<sup>24</sup> Another

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<sup>22</sup>Quotations from Acosta, History of the New World, Books 5 and 6, as quoted by Daniel Brinton, The Myths of the New World, (Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c.1896) pp. 210. 211.

<sup>23</sup>Lewis Spence, op. cit., pp. 48. 49.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. p. 63.



myth of creation, with Viracocha in the role of Creator, is told by Gamboa. It is principally in reference to the origin of people. They were supposed to have come out of Tampu-Tocco, which was a house on the hill. As the narrative goes, various tribes were supposed to have come out of various windows. The four pairs, says Gamboa, "knew no father nor mother, beyond the story they told that they came out of the said window by the order of Tioei Viracocha; and they declared that Viracocha created them to be lords."<sup>25</sup> In these creation myths, chiefly the first, there is apparently creatio ex nihilo in the creation of the universe. The creation of man by the formation of stone statues is very much related to the accounts of man being created from dust or clay, related enough to indicate a possible common tradition.

As a footnote to the Peruvian myths, the Peruvian concept of Pachacamac, though undoubtedly a later deity, ought to be included here. "The name Pachacamac signifies 'Earth-generator', and the primitive centres of the worship of this deity were in the valleys of Lurin and Rimac, near the city of Lima. In the latter once stood a great temple to Pachacamac, the ruins of which, alone, now remain."<sup>26</sup> Alexander adds that "in the Chincha territory were located the two great shrines of Rimac and Pachacamac, whose oracles even the Incas courted . . .", and according to Garcilasso, author of El Inca, the word Pachacamac means "Maker and Sustainer of the

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<sup>25</sup>Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, History of the Incas, quoted by H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American, (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 249.

<sup>26</sup>Lewis Spence, op. cit., p. 50.



Universe". He is of the opinion also "that the worship of this divinity originated with the Incas, who, nevertheless, regarded the god as invisible and hence built him no temples and offered him no sacrifices, but adored him inwardly with the greatest veneration . . . it is clear that Pachacamac is a creator god, antagonistic (if not superior) to the Sun , , ,"<sup>27</sup>

Thus, with a rather brief note on the worship of Pachacamac, a rather lengthy dissertation on the Peruvian concept of creator and creation, and a much too brief investigation of the South American tribes as a whole, the inquiry into creation legends, myths, and tales of the Amerindians draws to an abrupt close. The most informative tribes along the way have been the Algonkins and Californian tribes of North America, the Quiche of Guatemala, and the Peruvian groups of South America. Some tribes have had not one, but several creation myths; others haven't even had the concept of a creator, much less a creation legend. There have been a number of details that all, or practically all, creation myths have had in common, such as the idea of a primeval water covering the earth; on the other hand there have been such a large number of details peculiar to individual tribes alone, that one may wonder if there is any connection whatsoever between the myths of the various groups.

And so the inquiry proceeds toward the obvious, a conclusion: the apparent indications from the evidence available. This will be the subject of the following and final chapter.

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<sup>27</sup>H.B. Alexander, Mythology of All Races - Latin American (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., c.1920) XI, 224. 225.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding investigation there have been a number of concepts gleaned from the creation myths of the Amerindians. Many of these concepts are similar or identical to the Biblical concept of creation. Many of these concepts and details are similar to (or identical with) those of other tribes within their particular group, or to tribes unrelated in various parts of the New World.

The concepts and details that both Genesis and a number of the Amerindian myths have in common are listed as follows: the belief in one Supreme Creator, the concept of an increate Creator, the concept of creatio ex nihilo, the idea of a fiat creation, the concept of a primval water everywhere before creation, the detail of creating man from the earth, the idea of a primal pair, the idea that the Creator was pleased with his creation, the belief in an original paradisiac bliss, and, finally, the concept of a "devil", or force of evil, opposing the Creator.

To begin with the first, the belief in one Supreme Creator, almost every tribe of North, Central, and South America are unanimous on this point. In the preceding investigation, no less than forty groups or tribes held to the concept of a Supreme Creator. These tribes are listed as follows: the Montagnais, Senecas, Virginia Indians, and Lenape-Delawares of the North and East Algonkians; the Creeks, Seminoles, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Natchez of the Natchez group; the Muskogees; the Central Algonkin Shawnees; the Winnebago; the Pawnee; the Atsina, Cheyenne, and Arapaho of the West Algonkians;



the Zuni; the Athabascan group; the Atsugewi and the Achomawi; the Yuki, Maidu, Wintu, and Wishosk of the West Coast; the Selish of the Northwest; the Aztecs, Chichimecs, Tezoucans, Toltecs, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Tarascans of Mexico; the Guaymis and Isthmians of Central America; the Selivan, Uitoto, and Chibcha tribes of Colombia; the Caribs of Guiana; the Chaco of Argentine; and the Inca and Pre-Inca tribes of Peru. The concept of an increate Creator, however, appears rarely. Whether this detail was eliminated because it was unanimously accepted and taken for granted with these tribes, or because it was overlooked by the chroniclers, it is difficult to say. At any rate, the Omaha, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs seem to be the only tribes recording this idea.

The concepts of creatio ex nihilo and a fiat creation are very definitely found in North, Central, and South America, though sparsely distributed. The idea of creatio ex nihilo is found among the Winnebago, the Wishosk of the West Coast of North America, the Pimas of Lower California, the Quiches of Guatemala, and the Uitoto of Colombia. A fiat creation is found among the Yuki of California, the Wishosk, the Pimas, the Quiches, and the Incas of Peru.

The idea that there was originally a primeval water everywhere was recorded in the previous section seventeen times, and all seventeen of the tribes were either in North or Central America. Several tribes in addition to these, one being in South America, record a primal fog or darkness. The tribes that have an account of the all-embracing water are: the Muskogeans; the Creeks, Seminoles, Choctaws, Chicaws, and the Natchez of the Natchez group; the Omaha; the Pawnee; the Arapaho; the Zuni; the Athabascan group; the Yuki, Maidu, and Wintu of California; the Selish; the Mixtecs of Mexico; and the Quiches of Guatemala.



The detail that man was formed from clay or earth is, interestingly enough, fairly widespread. It is found among the tribes of North America, Mexico, Central America, and South America. With the exception of the Incas, who recorded that Viracocha created man by carving stone statues, these tribes all describe the creation of man from earth: the Creeks, Seminoles, Choctaws, Natchez, and Chiclasaws of the Natchez group; the Muskogees; the Hopi; the Yuki and Maidu; the Selish; the Tarascans of Mexico; the Quichés; the Tunja of Colombia; the Caribs; the Chaco; the Incas. The creation of a primeval pair, male and female, was a part of the creation myths of only seven tribes: the Arapho, the Yuki, the Maidu, the Selish, the Tarascans, the Chaco, and the Incas.

Less frequent yet is the statement that the Creator was pleased with his creation. But, on the other hand, so very rarely is the Creator displeased with it -- the account of the Quiché creators' displeasure with their creation of man is one of the rare instances -- that one might rightly argue from silence that most of the tribes assumed the Creator liked his creation. What ever the case may be, in the preceding inquiry only three tribes include this detail in their accounts. They are the Arapho, the Yuki, and the Quichés. Perhaps the reference to the Quichés requires an explanation. The creators, according to the Popol Vuh, were very well pleased with their creation as a whole; the only detail that displeased them was the formation of man from mud.

The idea of the paradisiac bliss, a primal joy and happiness, is also found only in the myths of three tribes; the Omaha, the Hopi and the Caribs. Particularly was this point brought out in connection with the Guiana tribes.



And finally, there is the reference to a force of evil, in many instances, in the creation myths of the Amerindians, an individual not unlike the Christian concept of Satan. The western tribes of North America particularly have vivid descriptions of this individual, personified to them in the figure of Coyote. These are the tribes that include the concept of a "devil" as opposing the Creator: the Maldu, the Hoca tribes (Atsugewi and Achomawi), the Wintu, and the Quiches.

With these statistics in mind, one cannot help but conclude that there might be some relationship among these myths. That they all came from a possible common tradition, and that the similarities are not due to the later influence of missionaries, is a conclusion not as ridiculous as some suggest. The widespread similarities, and the numerous identical details found among these myths, definitely indicate that they most likely had a common tradition, that furthermore, this traditional account and the Biblical account of Genesis record one and the <sup>a</sup> same thing, and that the former possibly had its origin in the latter.

Father Schmidt, as he reviews the numerous similarities of myths all over the world, and the Western Hemisphere in particular, has come to the same conclusion. In his Origin and Growth of Religion he indicates these points of almost universal agreement:

The Supreme Being is recognized as creator more or less definitely . . . among the Ainu . . . the oldest Tierra del Fuegian people (the Halakwulup) and most especially among the primitives of the American North-West, the North Central Californians, the Algonkin, both Eastern and Western, and the Algonkinized Winnebago. In this last group we find the idea of creation in its highest form, that of creation ex nihilo, expressed with the greatest definiteness and explicitness. Their myths are concerned above all with creation, and their great national ceremonies are representations and repetitions of the creative process. The Supreme Being is explicitly recognized as creator of the earth and of the universe . . . among the Bushman, the Ainu, the Sam-



oyeds, all the North American primitives, the Halakawulup . . . The raising of the earth from the primeval deep, in a myth found among the Samoyeds, some North Central Californians and Algonkins, is accomplished by the Supreme Being in the authentic Arapaho creation story, and not by waterfowl. Almost the same peoples acknowledge the Supreme Being as creator of men also, or of the the primal pair, which is the oldest form of the creation of man . . . As to the fashion in which he made the first man or men, that is by no means always explained. In North Central California, where our information on the subject is most complete, three methods are described . . . In the third, his body was formed out of clay and life was put into the bodies of clay overnight by the Supreme Being sweating amongst them . . . Among the Ainu, God makes the skeleton out of a piece of wood and fills in the gaps with earth . . .<sup>1</sup>

Father Schmidt continues to summarize the world-wide similarities, too numerous to mention in detail here. But the sum and substance of his conclusions concerning the origin of these myths has been summed up in a short paragraph in his Primitive Revelation, where he is discussing primitive religions:

In fine, wherever we find information about the origin of these religions, we are never told that the people in question has made its own religion; and even less do we glean answers that would warrant our concluding to a slow growth and development of these religions through men's searching and inquiry. The changes which we perceive are, without exception, a decline from higher to lower levels . . . Taken all in all, the data given us by the very adherents of the oldest religions not only do not favor the assumption that these religions were created by the searching and inquiry of men, but, what is more, they do not mention even a single word about it. All their direct answers point to a belief in a divine revelation.<sup>2</sup>

Father Schmidt does not merely attack the theory that man developed this type of creation story and religion over a period of years, but he has come

<sup>1</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Origin and Growth of Religion (New York: The Dial Press, 1931) pp. 272. 273.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm Schmidt, Primitive Revelation (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., c.1939) pp. 176. 177.



to the conclusion that these myths spring from a divine revelation, and intimates that the Biblical account of Genesis was the original tradition from which the others were copied, handed down, and orally transmitted.

Here is his defense of the Bible in the light of modern investigations:

From the coign of vantage of our present Twentieth Century, and after countless ethnological investigations, we of today can reconstruct a picture of the first beginnings of the human race; in many points this picture harmonizes with reality. But, of course, it is utterly out of the question that such a picture could have been sketched by the Israelites, could have been excogitated out of nothing, at some later period in their history. Had the Israelites really set themselves to compose such a picture, it would have proven to be something totally different, perhaps something like the Babylonian histories, which from the beginning to end are stamped with their late origin or transition. So when we meet with such an astonishingly congruous picture of that primitive age in the Sacred Book of the Israelites, we must conclude that such could have gotten there only on the pinions of traditions that had been sacredly guarded for thousands of years -- traditions which, in their ultimate analysis, extending far into the past, cannot have been too far removed from the times which they profess to describe.<sup>3</sup>

Previously in the Introduction, Father Schmidt's theory of the transmission of myths along with the immigrations across the Behring Strait from Asia, was outlined. Franz Boas, who has also made a detailed study of Amerindian myths, has come to the same general conclusion. Muntsoh relates that:

Boas studied the diffusion of myths with special reference to American mythology. He believes that the same combination of elements in the stories of two regions indicate diffusion from a single center. He not only admits diffusion of tales between the Eskimo and the northwestern tribes, but believes "that the facts justify the conclusion that transmission of tales between Asia and America has actually taken place."<sup>4</sup>

Muntsoh relates that primitive religion, not only does not prove that man's

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p. 221.

<sup>4</sup>Albert Muntsoh, Cultural Anthropology (New York: Bruce Publishing Co., c.1934) p. 211.



religion evolved from something lower, but proves the opposite. He wrote that: "Primitive mythology is, therefore, a proof that, far back in the earliest days, man was not a dumb creature in the presence of the sublime and awful phenomena of nature."<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, with the possibility of the transmission of myths from Asia to America firmly established, and the likelihood that the Amerindians' myths evolved locally poorly-supported by fact, and the similarity between myths demanding an explanation, it appears quite evident, as far as evidence is available, that all these myths did come from a common tradition, which was substantially the same account as recorded in Genesis. As James Freeman Clarke has so aptly summarized the whole situation throughout the primitive world, as well as for the primitives of the New World:

It is an unquestionable fact, and a very curious one, that the human race should have thus held to a beginning. They never seemed to have thought for a moment that things have always been as they are now. They have believed in the existence first of formless matter which afterward took form under the influence of some superhuman intelligence. Every religion and every mythology has held to the same formula, "from chaos to cosmos."<sup>6</sup>

And thus the inquiry concludes. Once more the question of Dr. Zwemer is posed: "Who can resist the conclusion that these many and multiform creation-myths, these constant memories of the lost 'age of innocence' point to a common human tradition and corroborate the Scriptural data?"<sup>7</sup> Few can resist, for that is just what the facts point to: a common human tradition and a corroboration of Scriptural data!

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p. 206.

<sup>6</sup>James Freeman Clarke, op. cit., pp. 195, 196.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel Zwemer, The Origin of Religion (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1935) p. 120.



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